Adventure

SEPTEMBER 1st

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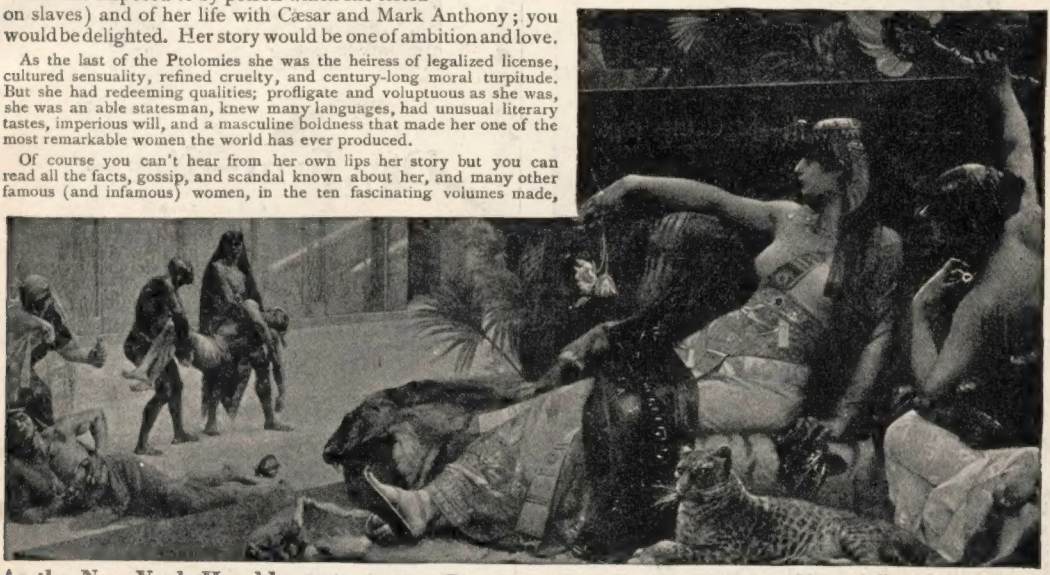

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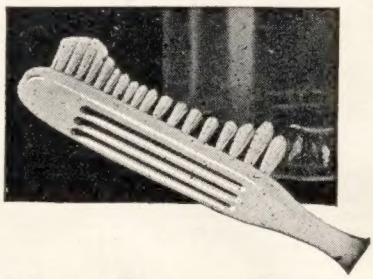

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Volume 63
Number 6

WHAT I THINK OF PELMANISM—

By Judge Ben B. Lindsey

PELMANISM is a big, vital, significant contribution to the mental life of America. I have the deep conviction that it is going to strike at the very roots of individual failure, for I see in it a new power, a great driving force.

I first heard of Pelmanism while in England on war work. Sooner or later almost every conversation touched on it, for the movement seemed to have the sweep of a religious conviction. Even in France I did not escape the word, for thousands of officers and men were *Pelmanizing* in order to fit themselves for return to civil life.

When I learned that Pelmanism had been brought to America by Americans for Americans, I was among the first to enroll. My reasons were two: first, because I have always felt that every mind needed regular, systematic, and scientific exercise, and, secondly, because I wanted to find out if Pelmanism was the thing that I could recommend to the hundreds who continually ask my advice in relation to their lives, problems, and ambitions.

In the twenty years that I have sat on the bench of the Juvenile Court of Denver, almost every variety of human failure has passed before me in melancholy procession. By *failure*, I do not mean the merely criminal mistakes of the individual but the faults of training that keep a life from full development and complete expression.

Pelmanism the Answer

If I were asked to set down the principal cause of the average failure, I would have to put the blame at the door of our educational system. It is there that trouble begins—trouble that only the gifted and most fortunate are strong enough to overcome in later life.

What wonder that our boys and girls come forth into the world with something less than firm purpose, full confidence and leaping courage? What wonder that mind wandering and wool gathering are common, and that so many individuals are shackled by indecisions, doubts and fears?

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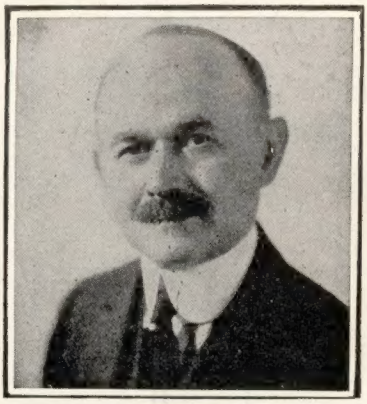

JUDGE BEN B. LINDSEY

Judge Ben B. Lindsey is known throughout the whole modern world for his work in the Juvenile Court of Denver. Years ago his vision and courage lifted children out of the cruelties and stupidities of the criminal law, and forced society to recognize its duties and responsibilities in connection with the "citizens of tomorrow."

As a matter of fact, Pelmanism ought to be the beginning of education instead of a remedy for its faults. First of all, it teaches the science of self-realization; it makes the student *discover* himself; it acquaints him with his sleeping powers and shows him how to develop them. The method is *exercise*, not of the haphazard sort, but a steady, increasing kind that brings each hidden power to full strength without strain or break.

Pelmanism's Large Returns

The human mind is *not* an automatic device. It will *not* "take care of itself." Will-power, originality, decision, resourcefulness, imagination, initiative, courage—these things are not gifts but results. Every one of these qualities can be developed by effort just as muscles can be developed by exercise. I do not mean by this that the individual can add to the brains that God gave him, but he can learn to make use of the brains that he has instead of letting them fall into flabbiness through disuse.

Other methods and systems that I have examined, while realizing the value of mental exercise, have made the mistake of limiting their efforts to the development of some single sense. What Pelmanism does is to consider the mind as a whole and treat it as a whole. It goes in for mental team play, training the mind as a unity.

Its big value, however, is the instructional note. Each lesson is accompanied by a work sheet that is really a progress sheet. The student goes forward under a teacher in the sense that he is followed through from first to last, helped, guided, and encouraged at every turn by conscientious experts.

Pelmanism is no miracle. It calls for application. But I know of nothing that pays larger returns on an investment of one's spare time from day to day.

(*Signed*) Ben B. Lindsey.

Note: As Judge Lindsey has pointed out, Pelmanism is neither an experiment nor a theory. For almost a quarter of a century it has been showing men and women how to lead happy, successful, well-rounded lives. 600,000 Pelmanists in every country on the globe are the guarantee of what Pelman training can do for *you*.

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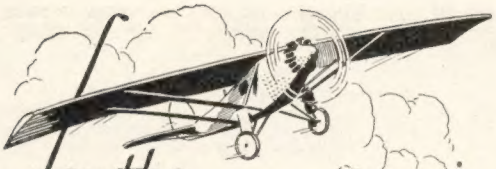

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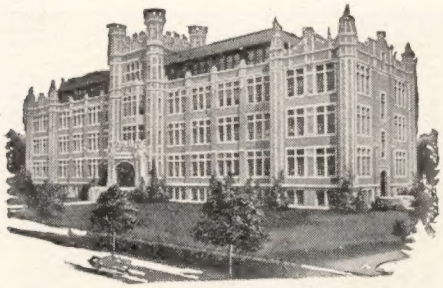

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You—who are reading these words—can do what I have done if you have a mind to. You don't need education, experience, capital or influence. I didn't have any of these things.

I had to leave school when I was thirteen, so I had mighty little education. I had no real estate experience. I never earned more than just enough to keep me out of the poorhouse, so I had no capital. And, as for influence, where would a $50-a-month brakeman get any?

And you don't have to go to a big town to succeed. I am located in a little New York State town of only 3,000 population.

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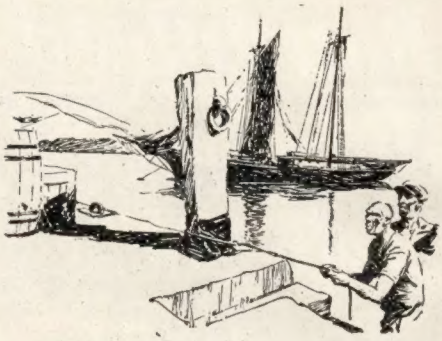

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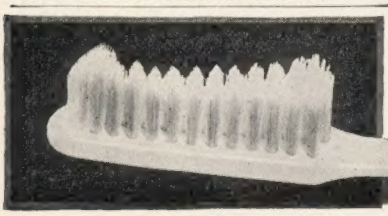

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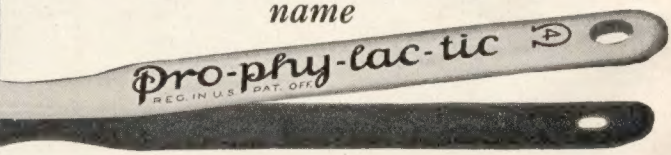

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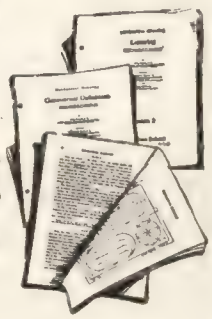

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IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA,
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don't fool yourself

A tip for office workers

What kind of people do employers like to have around them?

Certainly not people with halitosis (unpleasant breath). You couldn't blame a man for firing an employee with halitosis to hire one without it. Why not keep yourself continually on the safe and *polite* side by daily rinsing the mouth with Listerine, the safe antiseptic?

⅓ Had Halitosis

200 dentists declare that about every third patient is frequently halitoxic—and further declare they have been forced to use Listerine in self-defence.

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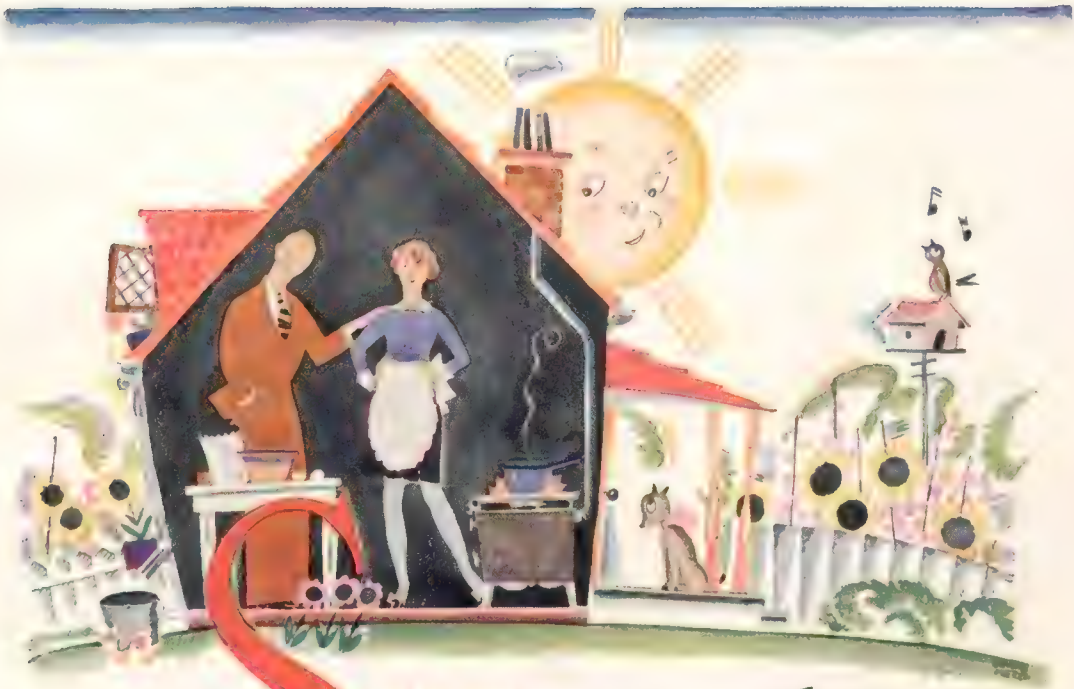

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here's how:

FUDGE CENTER. 1½ cups pure cane sugar; ½ teaspoon creamery butter; 1 cup rich, full cream milk; 1 cup corn syrup; white of one egg.

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And the reason Oh Henry! tastes just like home-made candy, is that it is made on this original home recipe, multiplied thousands of times for the folks who know what's good!—

Oh Henry!

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A short story with a long moral

IS that *all?*" laughed Joyce in amazement at Polly's costly layout of skin lotions, beauty soaps, morning cream, night cream, cleansing cream, vanishing cream.

"Don't laugh, darling. I'm going to have your kind of complexion or die in the attempt."

"But Polly, I just use Guest Ivory and cold cream."

After a month of using Joyce's simple method (Guest Ivory and warm water twice a day, with a little cold cream afterwards), Polly is now convinced that this perfect cleansing gives her skin all the care it needs.

Her complexion is clear and smooth. And she loves the dainty little white cakes of pure Guest Ivory, with their carefully-rounded edges and charming blue wrappers, for which she pays the extravagant price of five cents each.

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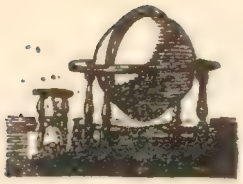

Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

1927

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Joseph Cox
EDITOR

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Hashknife and the Ironclad cache

CROOKED COIN

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

By W. C. TUTTLE

THE AH RANCH-HOUSE was a rambling one-story structure hidden away in a grove of live-oaks. It had been built many years ago, when Blue Joint Valley was young in the memory of cattlemen, by Jasper Hampton, the present owner; he had linked the initial of his wife's name, Anna, with the Hampton initial and registered his brand. "Dad" and "Ma" Hampton had grown old in Blue Joint Valley struggling against odds to make the old place pay them a living. The odds had been rather too much. Three summers of drouth; three winters of blizzards—that kind of climate does not tend to produce herds.

Behind the old ranch-house were the big old stable, the corrals and covered sheds, near a little willow-bordered stream which bore the unlovely name of Hangman Creek. The front yard of the AH ranch was a garden of flowers, tended religiously by little white-haired Ma Hampton, who tried to make her yard just a little prettier than any yard in the valley.

Dad Hampton was a tall, gaunt, white-haired man with a hooked nose, deeply lined face, deep-set blue eyes beneath huge, shaggy white brows. Even at seventy his figure was erect, his muscles supple. Once he had been able to employ one man, a fellow called "Indiana" Hogue, who was neither a top-hand cowboy nor a lovable character; hard times had forced him to let even Indiana go.

It was a day in August when "Friday" Jones rode to the AH ranch. Friday was long, lean, buck-toothed, uneducated. His waist was so small that he had great difficulty in keeping up his trousers and chaps. As a matter of fact, he rarely succeeded, hence his long-waisted appearance.

At the stable, he tied his roan horse, took off his shot-gun chaps, hung them over the saddle, adjusted his belt and holster to a point above his hip-line and went around to the front porch. Friday did not adjust his belt and gun because he was looking for trouble, but because he didn't want them to fall down around his legs.

Dad Hampton met him at the porch, and it seemed to Friday that the old man's eyes looked as if he had been crying. But that was no affair of Friday Jones'; he was there on business. In fact Friday Jones would never have come to the AH ranch unless it was on business.

"Howdy," said the old man slowly. He did not seem to be surprized to see Friday.

"Hyah," nodded Friday grinning. It was not a pleasant grin, for Friday's mouth was not constructed to grin pleasantly.

"How soon can yuh move off?" asked Friday.

"How soon can I move off?"

The old man lifted his head and stared at Friday.

"Yeap—that's what I said. Pete Guest sent me out here to find out. Yore time is up, and Pete wants the ranch. Said fer me to see about yuh, Hampton."

"Peter Guest sent *you*?"

The emphasis on the "you" irritated Friday Jones.

"Yeah, he sent *me!*" snapped Friday. "Whatcha goin' to do about it?"

"Nothing."

The old man shook his head sadly. For a year he had hoped against hope that this would never happen. Four years ago he had mortgaged the AH ranch for eight thousand dollars with the Rainville bank, of which Peter Guest was president and owner.

It was a three-year mortgage, and had been taken just before Blue Joint Valley had become a hard-luck spot for the cattlemen. It had always been a struggle for Dad Hampton to make any money, even in normal years; but the successions of drouth and bitter winters had wiped out any chance he had to meet the mortgage.

At the end of the three years the mortgage was foreclosed, but the bank was obliged to give him a year in which to redeem the mortgage— and that year was up. The Rainville bank now owned the AH ranch and all it contained.

"How long will it take yuh to git out?" asked Friday.

"How long?"

"Yeah. I'm takin' it over—goin' to run it. Pete said to oust yuh as quick as I could."

"Oh, yes."

Dad Hampton nodded dumbly. He did not know what to do. He had suddenly became very old, dazed, helpless. He had feared that this stroke of ill-fortune was coming, but it had not seemed to him that it could ever become a reality. For close to fifty years this place had been his home.

"Well, what in hell are yuh goin' to do?" demanded Friday. "Goin' to stand there and look through me?"

Dad Hampton sighed heavily.

"I suppose we'll have to go," he said slowly. "I didn't realize that—well, it's been comin' a long time. Pete will give us a few days to get ready, I suppose."

"Yo're supposin' a hell of a lot, ain't-cha? Pete told me to move yuh out today —right now. I'm all set to take charge. He said yuh wouldn't have anythin' to move. I'll let yuh have the team and wagon to move yourself to town."

"But we can't move today, Friday. It isn't enough time."

"The —— it ain't! As far as I'm concerned yo're moved right now. You git the old lady and I'll hitch up the team. I'm boss of the AH ranch right now, and what I say goes!"

"But you can't throw us out," said the old man steadily. "We can take our time in moving."

"Yuh think yuh can, eh? Why, you damned old psalm-singer, this place don't belong to yuh. Can'tcha understand that I'm boss here now? I'm the jigger that says what will and what won't be on this ranch. And when I tell yuh to move —you'll move."

He shoved the old man aside and strode to the door. But the door swung open just ahead of his reaching hand, and he was confronted by a tall, hard-faced, slightly-stooped man, whose level blue eyes bored into him with a steady gaze.

Friday Jones stepped back, his jaw dropping slightly. He forgot just why he had come to the AH ranch. His right hand jerked back toward his holstered gun, but the belt had slipped a little and the gun was behind his right leg. And before he could reach it, this hard-faced man hit him square in the jaw with a fist that felt like a hunk of iron. Friday Jones crashed back against the porch, rebounded to his hands and knees, almost knocked out.

In a dazed sort of way he realized that this man was taking his gun away and throwing it out into the yard. Then the man picked him up, jambed him back against the wall of the house and began talking slowly and distinctly.

"Jones, I heard every word yuh said. You didn't know I was back, did yuh? If yuh had, yuh wouldn't have come here. I've served my time. You and yore dirty gang swore me into prison for attempted murder, when all of yuh knew I gave you an even break that night. I've spent two years of hell, because you fellers lied about that gun-fight.

"Oh, I know about the legal end of this present deal. It's all right. Dad has lost his ranch. But no dirty, two-faced coyote like you can come out here and *throw* him off. Yo're goin' to get on yore bronc and go back to Pete Guest, and you'll tell him to send a *man* out here— not a—a thing like you.'"

He caught Friday by the shoulders, whirled him around and flung him off the porch. The luckless Friday went headlong into a rose-bush. Presently he got to his feet, minus his hat and one sleeve of his shirt, and went drunkenly to his horse. He had a deep scratch down his long nose and his jaw throbbed painfully, but he mounted his horse and rode away, thankful that things were no worse.

Friday was still dazed when he rode into Rainville, the metropolis of Blue Joint Valley. He guided his horse to the front of the bank and dismounted. The Rainville bank was a glaring red-brick structure, the only brick building in the town.

As Friday Jones tied his horse to a hitching-rack, he met "Splinter" Woods, the sheriff of Blue Joint County. Splinter was six feet two inches tall and weighed close to two hundred and fifty; a big blond giant of a man, he was, with a huge mustache that seemed to dwarf his features and a pair of washed-out blue eyes almost concealed in grin-wrinkles.

Splinter considered Friday gravely.

"Somethin' must 'a' happened to yuh, Friday," he observed. Friday nodded shortly and flexed his jaw. A piece of skin about the size of a dime was missing from his chin.

"Didja know 'Bull' Hampton was back?" he asked wearily.

"Yea-a-ah," drawled the sheriff. "Got back yesterday."

"I didn't know it until a while ago."

"Uh-huh."

The sheriff's mustache twitched, which was a sign he was amused.

"He damn near killed me," said Friday flatly.

"I'll betcha." More twitching of the mustache.

"Pete Guest sent me out there to take charge of the AH ranch."

"Oh, yeah."

Friday went toward the bank and the sheriff went with him.

The Rainville bank was not a big establishment, but it was the biggest in the valley. Peter Guest, the president, was active in the daily work of the bank, assisted only by William Freeman, who was cashier, teller, bookkeeper, and did anything else about the bank that required his services. Freeman was a thin-faced, slightly bald individual, with brown eyes, long nose and prominent Adam's apple.

Peter Guest took one long look at Friday Jones and the sheriff and invited them back to his private office. He sat down at his desk, opened a box of cigars, selected one, closed the box and took plenty of time in lighting the weed. It was characteristic of Peter Guest that he did not offer a cigar to any one.

There was no question that Peter Guest was the richest man in Blue Joint Valley, although men said he was land poor. He would tip the scales at about a hundred and ten pounds, and to look at him one might doubt that he had as much as a one-inch chest expansion. His features were small, his face thin, and the skin of his head and face seemed stretched to the breaking point. His iron-gray hair lay flat on his scalp, always perfectly arranged; dry, weary-looking hair.

He invariably wore a stiff-bosom white shirt and no vest, no collar. His collar button was a large opal, showing a well defined crack across the middle, set in a circle of tarnished gold. He wore huge, barrel-like cuffs, clasped together with duplicates of his collar button, through which his thin wrists dangled. And on his feet he wore Congress gaiters that at one time possibly fitted snugly around his bony ankles; but since rubber naturally deteriorates after a few years, Peter Guest had to shuffle in his walk in order to not lose a shoe.

Now he looked at Friday Jones, shifted his glance to the big sheriff; a glance which might be interpreted, "What business is this of yours?" and turned to Friday again.

"Well?" he snapped. "What happened to you, Jones?"

Friday shifted uneasily.

"Well, I went out there," he said. "I told the old man to move out, and then Bull Hampton came out, knocked me down, took my gun away and told me to git to hell out of there."

Peter Guest shifted his eyes to the sheriff.

"Bull Hampton's back, eh?"

"Yea-a-ah."

"Go out and arrest him for assaulting Friday Jones."

"No-o-o-o."

"Why not?" demanded Peter Guest hotly.

The big sheriff yawned and shook his head slowly.

"Lotsa reasons, Guest. First place, I dunno what Friday said out there. Prob'ly had the lickin' comin'."

"I did not!" snapped Friday. "By God, lemme tell yuh—"

"I wouldn't, if I was you," said the sheriff. "Wastin' good breath, Friday. You prob'ly talked too much out there. Bull's jist finished two years in the pen, and he ain't feelin' so kindly toward yuh, to begin with. And you prob'ly said things that didn't help much."

The sheriff turned to Guest.

"Why didja send Friday Jones out there? Ain't yuh got no other men workin' for yuh?"

"I send whom I please. Don't you try to tell me what to do. I'll swear out a warrant for the arrest of Bull Hampton, and you'll have to serve it."

"No yuh won't, Guest."

"Won't I? And why not?"

"Because. Somewhere down among yore mean, ornery bunch of in-tes-tines, you've got a little spark of humanity. It ain't so big that it itches yuh. Prob'ly anybody that could assay a man's soul would report 'no trace' on yuh, but it's

there. And that little spark is goin' to keep yuh from arrestin' Bull Hampton on Friday's say-so. And that same little spark is goin' to make yuh let the old folks stay right there on the old ranch until they get a place to stay."

The big sheriff got slowly to his feet, looking down at the little banker, whose face was working nervously.

"Oh, I ain't givin' yuh any credit for bein' human, Guest," he said slowly. "But yo're goin' to do this."

"By God, I'll run my own business!" snapped Guest.

"Shore yuh will."

The sheriff walked out. For several moments the little banker stared at the accumulation of papers on his private desk. Then he turned and stared at Friday Jones, who was humped over in a chair, caressing his jaw.

"You get to hell out of here, will yuh?" rasped the banker.

"Yeah—shore," muttered Friday. "Any orders?"

"I just gave you one, you damn fool!"

Friday went slowly out, wondering what the order was. He was foreman of the Double Diamond ranch, which was owned by Peter Guest, and was used to taking many orders.

The Double Diamond had been acquired in the same way as the AH. In addition to his ranch property Peter Guest was sole owner of the big Ironclad mine, located about twenty-five miles east of Rainville—a big silver and lead producer, and growing bigger every day.

PETER GUEST had no family. He ate at a restaurant when he did not want to do his own cooking, and lived in a modest little shack of three rooms. He ate alone, drank alone, and limited himself to a five-dollar loss when the spirit moved him to play a few hands of poker; which was not often.

After Friday Jones had left the office, Guest walked out to where Freeman was working on some books.

"Write me some advertisements, Bill," he said. "I'm goin' to sell the AH and the Double Diamond—cheap."

"Going to sell both of them?"

"Yes. Can't get men that I can depend on."

"You took over the AH today, didn't you?"

"I did like hell! You write out those ads and I'll send 'em out."

"Oh, all right."

Guest went shuffling back to his private office; Bill Freeman tapped his teeth with the end of a lead pencil and stared out through a dusty window, wondering what Bull Hampton would say to him when they met.

Freeman had been a witness to the shooting. Bull Hampton had taken Millicent Reid to a dance in Rainville. In fact, she had turned down Freeman to go with Hampton. During the course of the dance Friday Jones had made a slurring remark, because Millicent, realizing that Friday had been drinking heavily, refused to dance with him.

Bull promptly met Friday and knocked him down. Later on in the evening Bull was entering a store, when he heard someone call his name. Friday Jones was at the edge of the sidewalk, just beyond the light from the store windows. Near the doorway was William Freeman, Andy Peterson and Harry McCall. As Bull whirled around in the doorway he heard Friday Jones say—

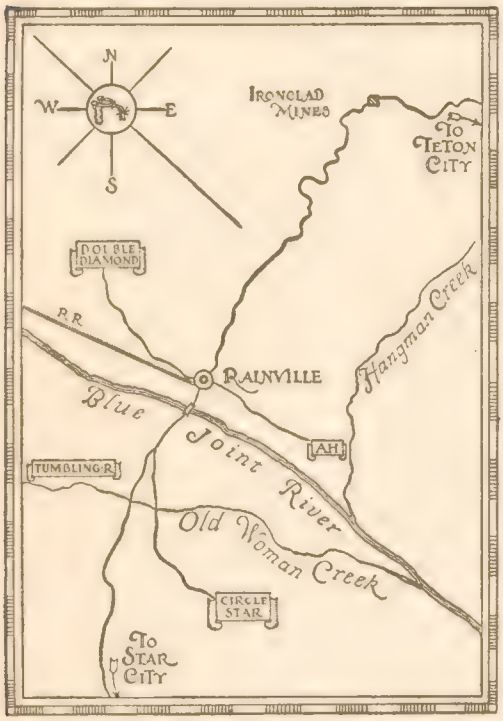
"I'm goin' to git you, Bull!"

There could be but one meaning to that remark. Bull was a streak with a six-gun, and he fired almost as soon as the words were out of Friday's mouth. The bullet struck Friday in the right shoulder, paralyzing his arm. He went down in a heap off the edge of the sidewalk. And in the ensuing commotion Bull did not know that Andy Peterson had picked up Friday's gun, concealed it until he could place it in Freeman's room at the hotel, subsequently swearing that Friday had left it there long before the trouble. Freeman also swore on the witness stand that Friday had left the gun in his room, for fear of trouble.

Thus there had been three witnesses to

the fact that Bull had shot Friday without provocation; and the fact that Friday had been unarmed earned Bull Hampton a two years' sentence for assault with a deadly weapon. And these three witnesses knew that Friday had been prepared to kill Bull, but that Friday had been a second too slow, and that the bullet had numbed his arm so badly that he never got the gun all the way out of the holster.

Two years is a long time to look ahead, and Freeman had not given the return of Bull Hampton much thought. He had



tried to be friendly with Millicent Reid, but without success. She had been to no dances in those two years, and not often did she come to town.

Freeman had been with Peter Guest since the founding of the Rainville bank, or rather, since Guest had acquired it five years before. Freeman realized that there was no future with Guest, but Freeman had gotten into a rut, content to take orders from a man he despised, because the position gave him a living. Freeman, however, was not without some ambition.

But just now Freeman was a bit dubious as to what Bull Hampton might do when they met. He had glued his ear against the private office door and had heard what had happened to Friday Jones. For William Freeman was not above listening. He felt that Peter Guest did not trust him fully, even after these years of faithful service. The Rainville bank handled the payroll of the Ironclad mines, sending it on to the paymaster each month; but it was always Peter Guest who handled it. He made up the payroll, sealed up the money and was very sure to see that it got into the strong-box on the stage.

Peter Guest owned the stage line, which ran to the Ironclad, to the north, and to Star City, to the south. There was little that Peter Guest did not have a hand in, as far as Blue Joint Valley was concerned.

RAINVILLE was the southern terminus of a branch railroad, which gave them intermittent service, but sufficient for the town's needs. Blue Joint River cut squarely through the valley, fed by numerous small streams. The Double Diamond was located on the river, about three miles northwest of town; the AH ranch about two miles southeast, also near the river and on Hangman Creek. Four miles southwest of town, on Old Woman Creek, was Washington Reid's Tumbling R ranch; and almost due south of town, about eight miles by a crooked wagon-road, was the Circle Star ranch, owned by the three men who operated it—Dan McKinley, "Chuck" Neeley and "Booze" Haverty, sometimes known as the "Howlin' Example."

Star City, about ten miles southwest of Rainville, was an almost played-out town, but still an outfitting point for a few cattlemen and for prospectors. It had been a growing town until the railroad came to Rainville. Just why the railroad made any difference it is hard to say; perhaps it looked as if Rainville might prosper as a consequence, and the inhabitants of Blue Joint Valley were looking for prosperity.

The following day after Friday Jones

had been virtually run off the AH ranch, Dad Hampton came to town, driving the old white horse hitched to a buggy. He tied the horse to the bank hitchrack and went in to see Peter Guest. The banker scowled and did not return the old man's greeting. It was characteristic of Peter Guest to scowl at people who owed him money—or who wanted a chance to borrow a few dollars.

"I just came in to talk with you, Peter," said the old man. "About the old ranch, you know."

"What about it?" grimly.

"About us movin' out, Peter. I—I guess I was kinda in a daze yesterday. It—I suppose I should have understood that my—our time was up. But when you've lived in a house for fifty years—"

"I'm goin' to sell the AH ranch," said the banker coldly. "You can stay there until I do."

The old man looked at him wearily.

"Goin' to sell the ranch? Oh, I suppose you will. We'll find a place as soon as we can. Bull came home, you know."

"I heard he did."

"I think he will stay now. We need him—me and Ma."

"Then you better tell him to keep—to let the cowboys alone. He's too fresh with his gun, Hampton. Yesterday he beat up a man of mine, and I had a hard time keepin' the sheriff from runnin' him in again. We don't want jailbirds around here."

The old man's eyes clouded. For several moments neither of them spoke. Then:

"Thank yuh for lettin' us stay, Peter. I'm sorry it worked out the way it did. I didn't want you to lose that money. But," hopefully, "mebbe you can sell it for a good price."

"Damn little chance of that. Nobody wants land around here. I'm holdin' you responsible for everythin' on the AH ranch."

"I'll take good care of it, Peter."

"See that yuh do."

The old man went outside and wandered down the street. The words of Peter Guest hammered on his ears—

"We don't want jailbirds around here."

Still he felt grateful to Peter Guest for using his influence with the sheriff. Dad knew there would be trouble if any one tried to jail Bull again. The two years in prison had aged Bull, embittered his soul. He was barely thirty, and looked forty. And there was nothing Bull could do to help his folks; he did not even have a job.

He had been christened John, but no one called him that now, except his mother. When he was a youngster he had gained his nickname because of his fighting ability and bulldog tenacity in battle. But Dad Hampton knew that there was a side to Bull which the public did not know anything about—the real Bull Hampton, not the fighter.

The old man sat down on a bench beside the door of a store. A few moments later he looked up at Splinter Woods, the big sheriff, who had halted beside him.

"Howdy, Splinter," said the old man. "Kinda warm these days."

"Pretty hot, Dad. Did Bull come in with yuh?"

"No, he didn't come in, Splinter. He—he's out at the ranch with Ma."

"Uh-huh. Tell him to come in and see me, will yuh?"

The old man stared at the sheriff wonderingly.

"No, I don't want him for anythin', Dad—just to talk with him. I knew he was back."

"You ain't got nothin' agin' him, have yuh, Splinter?"

"I sh'd say not. I always liked Bull."

"M-m-m-m."

The old man had his doubts.

"He—he had a little argument with Friday Jones yesterday," volunteered Dad.

"I know he did. Too bad he didn't put Friday in the hospital. Anyway, it's a wonder he didn't. If I was in yore place, Dad, I'd ask Bull to not wear a gun. You know what I mean."

"I'll tell him, Splinter. Anyway, we prob'ly won't be here long. I've lost the AH. Peter Guest is offerin' it for sale,

and as soon as he sells it we're movin' away."

"He's lettin' yuh stay until it's sold, Dad?"

"Yes, he told me today we could."

"Well, that's fine, Dad."

The sheriff went on. Old Dad was a strong believer in law and order, but he knew there would be no use in asking Bull to refrain from wearing a gun. The fact that a gun had taken two years off his life meant nothing to Bull.

Those two years had given him plenty of time to think over the lies that had been told during the trial. He knew why William Freeman had lied; Freeman had wanted him out of the way. Peterson and McCall had lied because Friday Jones was their bunkie. Bull could stand for their end of the dirty deal, but could hardly forgive Freeman for his part in it.

Old Dad rode back home and found Ma Hampton and Bull sitting together in the shade of the old porch. Ma's eyes lighted up when Dad told her they might stay on the ranch until Peter Guest found a buyer.

"What happened to the old Shylock?" wondered Bull.

"Don't call him that, John," said Ma quickly.

"That's what he is," declared Bull. "He's gettin' his pound of flesh. You think we ought to be grateful to him, when all he's lettin' us stay here for is because it saves him hirin' somebody to run the place until he can sell it."

Dad shook his head slowly.

"I think you're wrong, Bull. The sheriff wanted to come out here and arrest you for assault on Friday Jones, but Peter talked the sheriff out of the idea."

Bull stared at the old man for a moment.

"You believe that, Dad?"

"Peter told me."

Bull grimaced bitterly.

"And Splinter Woods used to be my friend."

"And Splinter told me to ask you to not wear a gun, Bull."

"Well, can yuh imagine that?" Bull laughed hoarsely. "Asked me to not wear a gun, did he? What's the big idea?"

"I suppose he don't want you to get into trouble, Bull."

"Has he disarmed all the punchers, Dad?"

"No, Bull, I don't think he has."

"Well, when he does, I'll foller suit."

"A gun has caused us lots of misery and suffering, John," said Ma, putting a hand on Bull's arm.

He put his arms around her and smiled down into her face.

"I'll be good, Ma. If you say so, I'll not wear a gun."

"Oh, I wish you wouldn't, John."

"Then I won't. Here," he quickly unbuckled his belt and handed it to her. "Take this belt and gun, Ma. Hang it up in yore room where I can't see it."

Ma shook her head, but took the belt and gun.

"I'll hang it up in your room, John," she said. "You've never broken a promise to me."

"Well, I'd rather make good with you than anybody I know, Ma."

She went into the house, and Bull turned to his father.

"What else was said down there, Dad?" he asked softly. "Why did Peter Guest let us stay on this ranch?"

"I dunno, Bull. It wasn't like him."

"What did he say about me? Go ahead; I don't mind."

"Well, he—he said, 'We don't want any jailbirds around here.' "

Bull's lips smiled, but his eyes clouded quickly.

"That's the worst of it all, Dad. That's what a prison does to a man. Innocent or guilty, you come out branded a jailbird. Pay yore debt to society! It's never paid, I tell yuh! There's a lot of poor devils up there, sent up by lawyers and liars, lookin' forward to the last day in that place. They think they're comin' back to where they left off. They've paid the price exacted by law. Poor devils! They never get through payin' the price."

"It's been mighty hard without yuh, Bull."

"O, I know, Dad. I ought to be

mighty thankful I've got you and Ma."

"You'll go over to see Milly Reid, won't yuh, Bull?"

"No."

"She's just the same, Bull."

"I'm not—I'm a jailbird. Let's not talk about her, Dad. I wrote to her twice, but she didn't answer. Oh, I don't blame her."

Bull got to his feet and stretched wearily.

"I reckon I'll go for a ride, Dad. It seems mighty good to fork a horse again and head off across the hills."

As he went striding down to the stable, Ma Hampton came from the house. She sat down beside Dad; neither of them spoke until Bull had saddled and ridden away.

"You remember I put the canary in John's room," said Ma softly. "I thought he'd like to have it in there."

Dad nodded slowly.

"I remember, Ma."

"It's gone, Dad."

"Gone? Yuh mean—"

Ma nodded slowly and her eyes filled with tears.

"The cage door was propped open with a hair-pin, Dad."

BULL HAMPTON rode straight across the hills, paying no attention to which way he was going. He swam his horse across Bule Joint River, rode west to Old Woman Creek and turned to the north, cutting into the Star City road.

He passed where the Tumbling R road intersected with the road he was following, and he drew up at the forks, half-minded to go to the Tumbling R. But sober reflection caused him to change his mind, and he rode north again.

Here the road twisted and turned through the swales. He met the stage, which was going to Star City, and the driver waved at him as the stage lurched past him in a cloud of dust. Bull did not know the driver.

He rode along, head down, thinking deeply, when suddenly his horse stopped stock-still. Bull lifted his head and looked at a woman, who had met him head-on, just where the road curved sharply around a clump of cottonwoods.

For several moments they looked at each other. The woman was tall, slim, sitting her horse with the ease of a cowboy. She wore no hat, and her reddish-brown hair framed a strong, but delicate face, tanned to an olive hue.

She wore a pale blue silk shirt, open at the throat, divided skirts, high-heeled boots. Her riding-rig was a plain black swell-forked saddle and the horse was a lanky sorrel, better bred than the average range animal.

The woman's wistful gray eyes searched his face. Yes, he had changed; grown older. Bull Hampton had been a very young looking man for his age—but not now. He was still handsome, but there were lines on his face which were not there when he went away. He looked at her, realizing that Millicent Reid was older, but more beautiful.

"I heard you were back," she said finally.

"I suppose they all know it," he said slowly. "I dunno—mebbe I was foolish to come back. Should have gone where no one knew me, I suppose."

She brushed back her hair, with a nervous gesture of her left hand.

"It has been a long time, Johnny."

"Has it?" quickly. She used to call him Johnny sometimes. He had hated the name, but not now.

"Not many changes," she said. "Rainville doesn't change."

"Not much, Milly. Times are a little different—folks kinda get old, I suppose. And these tough seasons—I didn't know about them. Where I was we don't get much news."

She fumbled with her reins for a moment.

"Didn't you—didn't any one write to you?"

"Mother and Dad. But they didn't want to worry me with bad-luck tales. Nobody else wrote to me."

She rubbed the palm of her hand on

the saddle-horn, her eyes averted as she said—

"Why didn't you write to me, Johnny?"

"Why didn't I?" He laughed shortly. "I wrote twice, Milly. When you didn't answer, I decided you didn't care to write letters to a jailbird."

"You wrote twice—to me?"

"Yeah, I shore did, Milly."

"You got my letter?"

Bull shook his head quickly.

"I never heard from yuh—not once."

"But I wrote to you." She leaned toward him, looking squarely at him, pleading with her eyes for him to believe. "Oh, I did write, Johnny! When I didn't hear from you for so long, I wrote you a long letter. But I never heard from you."

"Well, that's funny," he said slowly. "I wrote twice. It shore was tough. I got all the letters Mother and Dad wrote to me. I never told them I hadn't heard from you."

"I don't understand it. I put a return address on my letter—and it never came back."

"Meanin' that I got it—and didn't answer?"

"Oh, I didn't say that, Johnny."

"But you thought it, Milly. I don't blame yuh. But what's the difference now? They're all callin' me a cowardly gunman—a killer, a man who shoots an unarmed man. Don't I know? Even the sheriff has requested me to not wear a gun, and old Peter Guest, the dictator of Rainville, has notified me that Rainville don't want any jailbirds hangin' around. I suppose it isn't what I got sent up for—it's the fact that I was up there.

"My folks are broke, Milly. Peter Guest owns the AH ranch. They're just livin' on the old AH until a buyer comes along. Dad's too old to start over again, and I haven't a thing to give him. They're financially broke and I'm socially broke. Nobody around here would ever give me a job."

"Oh, I didn't know it was that bad, Johnny. Still I might have known. Every cowman in this country is in a bad way financially. Even Dad is—well, we're not very well off. It has been awful bad for nearly three years. Peter Guest is the only man who is ahead of the game. He is making a fortune out of the Ironclad mines. You knew he foreclosed on the Double Diamond, didn't you?"

"Yeah. They say he's got the Circle Star where they can't get away, and he'll foreclose on that very soon. If he keeps on he'll own Blue Joint Valley."

"I suppose," Millicent sighed deeply. "Why don't you come out to see us? Dad would like to see you. The same boys are there—'Tonto' Potts, Norm Leslie and 'Jawbone' Irving, and they all liked you."

"And Aunt Jennie?"

"Well," Millicent smiled, "you know Aunt Jennie. She's the best soul on earth, but she has ideas. I suppose I should never say a word against her, because she is the only mother I've ever known. But as far as that goes, she never did like you, Johnny. She said that no man who would rather ride his horse over a fence than to go around to the gate, would ever amount to anything."

Bull laughed heartily. He had heard Aunt Jennie make that remark shortly after he had jumped his horse over the Tumbling R ranch-house fence.

"We might as well laugh, Milly," he said. "It's a good way to keep from cryin'. But I can't think of annoyin' Aunt Jennie. I'll probably run across yore father and the boys one of these days."

He spurred his horse in close to her and held out his hand.

"I'm glad I saw yuh, Milly."

They shook hands gravely; then he rode on and she turned her horse homeward. She wanted to think that he had never received that letter, but found it hard to believe. With the return address on the envelope, such a thing did not seem possible.

Millicent met her father at the big stable, and he unsaddled her horse. Washington Reid, known to everybody as "Wash," had spent more money on his ranch buildings than the average cattleman. He had a big, comfortable ranch-house, well painted; big stables, well built

corrals; in every way an ideal ranch. But hard times were taking a toll now, and the place was slowly assuming a down-at-the-heel air.

Reid was a big man, inclined to carry much flesh around the waist-line and disinclined to wear suspenders. His face was round, good-natured, usually in need of a shave. It was from him that Millicent inherited her reddish hair and gray eyes.

"Well, how's Rainville?" he asked, panting just a little over the uncinching of the saddle.

"All right, Dad. I met Bull Hampton just beyond the forks."

He paused and looked at her.

"Yuh did, eh? Huh! Well, well! Back, eh? Lemme see. Yeah, it's two years all right. How is the old son-of-a-gun?"

"He hasn't changed much—little older."

"Uh-huh! Whoa!" He slipped the saddle loose and carried it into the stable, while Millicent held the horse. He came back in a moment and led the horse to a corral gate, where he slipped the bridle loose, slapped the animal on the rump and closed the gate. He folded up the reins, lifted his head and looked directly at Millicent.

"Milly, you still care anythin' for Bull Hampton?"

It was the first time he had ever asked her anything like that, even before Bull went to prison.

"Care anything for him?"

It was all she could say. He nodded quickly.

"I reckon yuh used to, Milly. And when everythin' is sifted down, I don't reckon Bull Hampton was much to blame for gunnin' Friday Jones. How'd Bull know that Friday didn't have a gun with him? Always did have."

Millicent stared at her father.

"You don't think he was guilty, Dad?"

"What if he was?"

"But folks will always— They—"

"Oh, yea-a-ah—the brand of Cain, eh? Jailbird. Sure thing! Well, humanity is queer. He didn't kill Friday Jones—jist stopped him, thasall. Assault with a deadly weapon! It's the first case of its kind in this county. Next thing they'll ask us to not wear guns!"

"They've asked Bull not to wear one."

"Can yuh e-magine that! Who did—Splinter Woods?"

"Yes."

"I'll be darned! I'll have to go down and have a talk with that walrus-faced idiot. Leave off our guns and depend on the law, eh? Can yuh e-magine that! Is Bull goin' to visit us?"

"I don't think so, Dad."

Wash Reid thought it over silently for a while, then:

"Well, I dunno. Say, you didn't answer my question."

"I'm not going to, Dad. It isn't a fair question."

She turned and went toward the house. He watched her enter the house before he hung up the bridle.

"Ain't a fair question, eh?" he muttered. "She ain't been to a dance nor a church sociable in two years. Huh!"

He stared at the house, rubbing his stubbled chin.

"My God, I hope she don't mention Bull Hampton to Aunt Jennie. The old girl ain't had a talkin' point for a week, and that would be a subject for enough debate to send me to town on a spree. I hope the man who married Milly will inherit Jennie; I'd like to breathe easy for once in my life."

BULL HAMPTON rode straight to Rainville. He had not intended going to town, but merely to cross the bridge just out of town and ride back over the AH road. The sheriff's office was the first building on the left as he rode into the south end of the main street. On the right was the big old frame building used as a court-house. Bull had plenty of cause to remember that building. To the right of the court-house, facing it on a cross street, was the little jail.

The main street of Rainville was little more than one long block in length. On

the east side of the street were the aforementioned court-house, O'Brien's saloon, the post-office, a general store, the stage-office, the Rainville bank and the Rainville hotel.

On the west side was the sheriff's office, livery-stable, blacksmith shop, Peacock saloon and gambling house and another general store. At the extreme north end of the town, about a hundred yards from where the main street left off, was the little depot, and the east of that the loading corrals. The different places of residence were scattered about with little regard to street lines.

At both ends of town the roads forked northwest to the Double Diamond, northeast to the Ironclad mines; southwest to Star City, the Tumbling R and to the Circle Star, and southeast to the AH ranch.

Bull did not see any one until he was passing O'Brien's saloon, when "Chuck" Neeley and "Booze" Haverty, two of the owners of the Circle Star, came out. It was a ten-to-one bet that Booze Haverty would be in one of the saloons, if he was in town.

Booze was a big raw-boned, long-mustached man, with a reckless disposition and a head as guiltless of hair as the proverbial billiard ball. He seemed to think that every one was deaf, and talked at the top of his voice. Chuck Neely was a short, fat, wide-mouthed person, with a perpetual grin and large feet.

Booze caught sight of Bull Hampton, and threw up both hands in a vociferous welcome.

"Hel-lo, convict! C'mere, yuh ol' stone-buster!"

Bull laughed and guided his horse to the front of the saloon, where the two cowmen stood grinning widely.

"Hyah, Booze! Hello, Chuckie, yuh fat rascal!"

Bull swung down and shook hands with them.

"I'm shore glad to see yuh again'," declared Booze. "Let's me and you and Chuck have a li'l drink, and then yuh can tell us all about the penitentiary. We want to kinda get a line on the place, 'cause we might have to go any time."

"You don't want to go up there," said Bull as they went into saloon. He was not a drinking man, but had always taken a drink with friends.

The bartender was an old acquaintance of Bull's, and made him feel welcome.

"You ain't figurin' on goin' to jail real soon, are yuh?" laughed Bull.

"Can't tell, Bull," said Booze, intent on filling his glass to the very brim. He replaced the bottle and turned to Bull.

"Dan McKinley is up at the bank havin' a heart-to-heart wau-wau with old Pete Guest."

"Has he got you hooked, too?"

"Yeah, he shore has. Goin' to foreclose on us. We borrowed ten thousand on a mortgage three years ago, and we've jist lived from hand to mouth ever since. Bull, you was damn lucky to be in jail all that two years. It was hell out here. Our cows died in the blizzards until every fence in this country was hung with hides. And them that wintered never got anywhere.

"Mercury went over a hundred in the shade, with wind blowin'. Burned the grass roots out. The Double Diamond threw up their hands and quit. Old Pete owns it now. We're eight hundred behind on our interest, and not a chance in the world. We ain't got no cows, Bull. Oh, it's a hell of a fix to be in! Dan's at the bank tryin' to make some kind of a deal—I dunno what it'll be. Well, here's a go, gents."

"Guest foreclosed on Dad," said Bull. "He's advertisin' the AH for sale."

"Yeah, I heard that," said Chuck sadly. "Shore tough. It's bad enough for fellers of our age to lose out thataway, but when yuh get as old as Dad and Ma Hampton, it's worse."

As they turned away from the bar Dan McKinley came in. He was younger than his two partners, sandy complexioned, red-headed; a man who took life rather seriously. He shook hands with Bull Hampton, and they all walked from the saloon.

"Well?" questioned Booze. "Whatcha know, Dan?"

Dan shook his head slowly.

"He told me he was already advertisin' the Circle Star for sale."

"The hell he is!" blurted Booze. "You ain't kiddin', are yuh, Dan?"

"I wish I was," Dan laughed shortly. "It's good-by Circle Star."

"Do yuh reckon old Pete would listen to me?" asked Booze.

"There's nothin' left to talk about."

"Mm-m-m-m. I've got a damn good notion to go up there and rob his old bank."

"No you ain't," drawled Dan. "We might as well roll up our blankets and call it a day. I tried to tell him that the Circle Star ain't worth what he loaned on it, and if he'd loan us a few more thousand we might pull him out of the hole."

"When he gets the Tumblin' R, he'll own this end of the valley," said Bull.

"Yeah, and he'll get it, too," declared Dan. "Wash Reid owes old Pete a lot of money. Told me he did."

"I reckon we were all alike," said Chuck. "Couldn't stand prosperity, so we borrowed money to buy more cattle. That's what happened to the Double Diamond and to us. Got a lot of cows that wasn't frost-proof."

"That's what happened to Dad," agreed Bull.

"Yeah, and the same thing happened to Wash Reid, only he had more behind his loan than we did."

"Well, let's go home and cry about it," suggested Booze. "If I get a couple more drinks, I'm liable to do somethin' real foolish. Come over and be miserable with us, Bull. We ain't too high-toned to associate with yuh."

"That's nice of yuh," said Bull, smiling.

The Circle Star outfit rode out of town, and the Double Diamond came in—Friday Jones, Andy Peterson and Harry McCall. Peterson was typically Norse. His hair was almost a canary yellow, and eyes besetting his pale blue pudgy nose. McCall was dark, thin-faced, wiry. His eyes were black and habitually half-closed.

They dismounted at the Peacock saloon hitchrack, and McCall and Peterson entered; Friday Jones went to the bank. Bull had gone to the post-office to ask for his mail, and when he came out he met McCall and Peterson. It was rather an embarrassing situation for the two cowboys. The last time they had seen him was in the court-house, when they had sworn him into the penitentiary; and they did not know, of course, just how he felt toward them now.

"Still around here, eh?" said Bull easily.

"Yu-yes," mumbled McCall. "Yeah, we're still here, Bull. Huh-how are yuh?"

"Talk natural," advised Bull. "I'm not wearin' a gun. If this country can stand for two damn liars like you two, I reckon I can."

"How do you make that out?" demanded Peterson, some of his nerve returning, especially since Bull did not have a gun.

"I wouldn't ask that question, Peterson," said Bull coldly.

"Thasso? Well, lemme tell you somethin', feller. Don't git too previous with all that 'liar' stuff! That's a fightin' word in this country."

"Start fightin'," said Bull. You're a pair of sneakin' liars, Peterson—you and McCall! If that ain't enough to make yuh fight, what else can I say?"

But McCall and Peterson hesitated. Splinter Wood, the big sheriff, was hurrying up the street, but Bull did not know this. He came up behind Bull and stopped.

"We don't want any trouble with yuh, Bull," said Peterson.

"Sure yuh don't. And you've been hopin' for two years that I wouldn't want any trouble with you two. You thought I'd forget what you fellers swore to, eh?"

"It—it was the truth," faltered Peterson.

"You dirty liar!"

"Bull!"

The sheriff stepped in and put his hand on Bull's arm. "Don't start anythin' here, Bull."

Bull turned his head and looked at the sheriff.

"This don't concern you, Sheriff," he said evenly.

"I say yuh can't fight, Bull."

"The hell I can't!"

The pent-up anger of two years surged throught Bull's body. Perhaps he had the wrong conception of the sheriff's motive, but it seemed to Bull that even the law was watching him; stopping him from fighting even with his hands.

And before the big sheriff realized what was happening, Bull had smashed him in the jaw with a powerful left-hand swing, knocking him flat on the sidewalk. The force of the blow whirled Bull sidewise, and on him sprang Peterson and McCall, pinning him to the wall.

But the two cowboys were no match for the berserk rage of Bull Hampton. He slipped his right hand loose and uppercut McCall, almost knocking him down. But McCall came back, with his six-shooter in his hand, trying to strike Bull over the head with it.

McCall was groggy, too groggy to hit effectively. Bull wound his arms around Peterson and flung him back into the staggering McCall, who, whether by accident or design, pulled the trigger of his gun, and the bullet smashed into the wall within a few inches of Bull's head.

Bull darted sidewise. Unarmed as he was he realized the odds were badly against him, but he had forgotten the sheriff, who was sitting up rubbing his head when Bull fell over him.

It is doubtful whether Peterson knew who fired the shot. He and McCall almost went down together, and Peterson skated wildly on his high heels, whipping out his gun. And as Bull fell to his knees, his right hand stopped within a few inches of the sheriff's holster. Twisting over on his side, he yanked out the gun. McCall was backing out into the street, still a little dazed over it all, and Peterson was retreating along the sidewalk, afraid to shoot Bull for fear of hitting the sheriff.

Bull laughed hoarsely when Peterson suddenly stepped into an alley between the post-office and a general store. Bull sprang to his feet, as McCall whirled and ran across the street, heading for the Peacock saloon. The sound of the shot had brought a number of people to the street, and they saw Bull Hampton walk away from the sheriff sitting on the sidewalk and go back to his horse, gun in hand.

He mounted, flung the gun into the street and rode out of town. Men ran to the sheriff, expecting to find him wounded; but the big-mustached officer got to his feet, rubbed his jaw and smiled crookedly. Peterson came sneaking back and joined the crowd.

"Where'd Bull go?" he asked.

"Got his horse and rode out of town," said some one.

"He shore came near gettin' me," declared Peterson. "That bullet didn't miss me an inch."

"Tryin' to kill you, eh?" It was Friday Jones. "Why don't yuh get that jigger, Sheriff?"

"Who saw the scrap?" asked the sheriff.

No one seemed to have seen it, but they had all heard the shot.

"Bull didn't have any gun, did he?"

"He took your gun," said Peterson. "He didn't have any."

Some one picked up the sheriff's gun and brought it to him. He glanced at it and saw it was fully loaded.

"Oh, I saw him shoot," said Peterson.

"Yo're a damn liar!" rasped the sheriff.

"There's the gun he took out of my holster! Take a look at it! Either you or McCall fired that shot. I heard him call you a liar, Peterson, and I didn't want to see anybody fightin' in the street, so I tried to stop him. Next time he calls you a liar, I'm goin' to help make it unanimous. And here's what's a lot more to the point:

"Next time you three jiggers show up from the ranch, I want yuh to either leave yore gun at home, or bring 'em right to me at the office. I don't trust no damn liar with a gun!"

The sheriff turned on his heel and walked down the street, leaving an amazed crowd behind.

"Any old time I give up my gun!" snorted Friday Jones.

"What right has he got to call me a liar?" demanded Peterson. "Why, that big-mouthed wind-bag! And we were helpin' him! Can yuh imagine that?"

"It's too bad yuh didn't call him that to his face," sighed "Jawbone" Irving, of the Tumbling R.

"Yeah, and I ain't afraid to tell it to him."

"Shore yuh ain't, Pete. Yo're brave as hell. But you'll leave yore gun at home jist the same. If Splint Woods told you fellers to wear bib-overalls and suspenders, you'd wear 'em."

"You see if we do," sneered Friday Jones.

"Anyway," laughed Jawbone, "it kinda looks as though Bull Hampton cleaned out all three of yuh. They tell me he hoodled you off the AH."

Friday snarled something, whirled on his heel and went across the street, followed by Peterson.

But Bull Hampton, as he rode homeward, got little satisfaction from the episode. In the first place, he realized, he had been foolish to start an argument with Peterson and McCall. He could gain nothing from fighting with them. And in the second place he had made a grave mistake in hitting the sheriff, who had a perfect right to try to prevent a street fight

"I'll never have any sense," he told himself. "Now, I'm in bad with the law again. But, by golly, it was fun while it lasted. It gave me a chance to blow off a little steam."

THREE men sat together in the dingy little office of a hotel in the little town of Teton Wells, looking through grimy windows at the narrow, rocky street. The tallest of the three men was humped forward in his chair reading a letter which he held in both hands.

He was several inches over six feet in height, with a long, serious face, wide mouth and calculating gray eyes. His raiment was typical of the range country, from battered sombrero to high-heeled boots. At his right sat a man whose dress was identical to his own; a broad shouldered cowboy, of medium height who wore his sombrero tilted at a rakish angle and gazed with wide blue eyes at nothing in particular; his lips were puckered in an unmusical, low-pitched whistle.

The third man was of middle age, rather portly, smooth of face. He wore a wrinkled black suit, a black Stetson and had the tops of his trousers tucked inside his knee-high boots. On a finger of his left hand he wore a huge diamond ring, and another rather large diamond graced his wrinkled tie.

"Know Peter Guest?" asked the tall man, glancing up from the letter.

"By rep," smiled the portly one. "Owns the Ironclad, along with everythin' else in Blue Joint."

"Know anythin' about Blue Joint?"

"Yea. Played-out cow-range, Hartley. Three years of blizzards and drouth have busted everybody over there—except Peter Guest. He went in there five years ago when the railroad built in, got control of the bank; and in five years he's become the richest man in the country. Of course, most of his money has come from the Ironclad. He's never made a cent out of land. In fact, he's lost money on the places he's had to foreclose on, but he'll make it back."

"What does the letter say?" asked the blue-eyed cowboy, ceasing his soft whistling. "Read her, cowboy."

The tall cowboy cleared his throat.

"Here's what she says, Sleepy:

> Dear Mr. Westfield:
> Replyin' to your letter of recent date, can say that I have placed no price on the AH and the Circle Star ranches. But would be pleased to take the matter up with you at any time. Would advise that you make this a strictly confidential matter, as these people are not at all in favor of having sheep in the valley. As your name is well known in this country, I would advise that you have a third party handle all transactions. I am sure we can get together on prices.
> Respectfully yours—PETER GUEST."

Sleepy Stevens sniffed disgustedly and

his blue eyes shut tightly for a moment. He hated sheep.

"Now, here's the proposition, Hashknife," said the big sheep-man. "You and Sleepy know ranch values. What I want is plenty of open range, with water. Get me an option on them two ranches, and when that's done I'll drop over there and close the deal. It won't take yuh more than a week. You can ride in from this side to the Ironclad mine in a day, and then it's an easy ride from there to Rainville. What do yuh say?"

Hashknife Hartley uncoiled his legs from beneath the chair, hoisted his heels up on the window-sill and rolled a smoke.

"That's a queer deal for me to take on," he drawled. "Buyin' land for a sheep-man. You know I never cared much for sheep, Westfield."

"That don't count with me, Hashknife. How many cowboys do I know—or sheep-men, for that matter— that I'd give a signed check for a thousand dollars and turn 'em loose?"

"I dunno."

"Y'bet yuh don't. I'll pay the expenses of you two as long as it takes yuh to go over there and settle the options, and then I'll give yuh a hundred apiece. Is that fair?"

"Thasall right," nodded Hashknife. "Gimme yore address. We may not come back this way."

"Sure. How are yuh fixed for money Hashknife?"

"Got enough."

Westfield wrote out his address in a note-book, tore out the page and gave it to Hashknife.

"I'd like to make you and Sleepy a proposition," he said.

"When I get sheep into Blue Joint, I'm goin' to need a couple of good men."

"You can drop that in the dirt and tromp on it," said Sleepy quickly.

"Same old Sleepy Stevens," laughed the sheep-man. "What will yuh do when the cows are all gone and there's nothin' but sheep on the ranges?"

"Set in the rocks with the rest of the decent folks and pot-shoot shepherds."

Westfield laughed heartily.

"Kinda rabid, ain't he, Hashknife?"

"Uh-huh—and kinda honest."

"I suppose. Oh, I know yore attitude. I was a cow-man until I wanted to make some money, and I know how yuh feel. But this Blue Joint Valley is a different proposition Everybody's broke—cattle all gone. The sheep will bring back prosperity."

"For you and Peter Guest, eh?" grunted Sleepy.

"Mebbe."

"Guest must be a pretty smart jigger," said Hashknife.

"Too smart for the average cow-man, Hashknife. I've never seen him, but they tell me he's kinda sharp. Oh, I don't mean he's crooked or anythin' like that—but kinda keen."

"And he's kinda scared folks won't welcome sheep."

"Yea-a-ah, that's true."

"Uh-huh. Well, we'll go over and talk prices with him. It's on the other side of the hill, ain't it?"

"Yeah."

"That makes it worth while; we'll leave here tomorrow."

And that was the greatest inducement —the other side of the hill. They always wanted to see the other side of the hill; and when they had seen it there were more hills to lure them on. They were of a restless breed, these two; confirmed fatalists, intensely human.

A job meant nothing to them. Fate had thrown them together on the old Hashknife ranch, which had given George Hartley his nickname. Son of a range minister, one of a big family of children, "Hashknife" Hartley had struck out early in life for himself, living the only life he knew—the life of a cowboy.

With but little schooling he had educated himself in his own way, fighting, dreaming, grinning his way along. Born with an inquisitive mind, he had developed an uncanny ability to puzzle out things for himself; to do things with problems that were a mystery to other men.

And when he had become a bunkie

of Dave Stevens, otherwise known as "Sleepy," the wide ranges called so strongly that they packed their bed-rolls and rode away from their steady jobs to become wanderers of the rangeland.

For a number of years they had gone up and down the land, seeming to follow the lines of least resistance, but always the instruments of a queer fate which seemed to fling them headlong into the troubles of other folks; this tall man and the short one, who grinned their way into the hearts of range folks, adjusted their troubles and rode away. Often they rode away poorer in pocket, but always richer in memory.

They laughed at life and at death. And they knew death. Death had ridden knee-to-knee with them many times, and they had laughed in his face. They had seen him through the smoke of a forty-five in saloons, gambling houses; they had heard his voice in the open ranges, speaking from hidden places.

But always they laughed at him and rode on toward the next hill.

"When yore name's called, no use dodgin'," Hashknife had declared. "There's a big book somewhere, and yore name's on one of the pages. And when the movin' finger stops at that name—*buenas noches.*"

There was nothing phenomenal in their ability with guns. Neither of them was able to split a second on the draw. They were willing to leave all that to the gunmen who, in most cases, had single-track minds.

Sleepy did not analyze anything. He left all that to Hashknife, following him blindly, cursing Hashknife for being fool enough to bother with things that did not concern him, following him just the same; because there was a bond between them stronger than just brotherhood—the bond between two men whose lives consist in doing good.

But this present mission had nothing to do with their usual line of work. It meant doing a favor for a friend and collecting a hundred dollars apiece for a few days' work. And they could use the money.

So that was why, two days later, these two men rode along the twisting grades of the Ironclad road, heading into the hazy stretches of Blue Joint Valley. They had spent the night at the Ironclad mine, where a hundred men labored, grubbing out wealth for Peter Guest.

The grades of the Ironclad were steep, the engineering not of the best—one of those mountain roads where a driver is only allowed one mistake in his life. Piñon pine, manzanita, an occasional balsam fir studded the sharp slopes, and far down in the cañons could be seen the lighter green of cottonwoods. Far below them, half hidden in the haze, were the hills around Rainville, the twisting course of the river; far beyond, the darker blue of the Blue Joint mountains which circled the west side of the valley.

Hashknife Hartley rode a tall gray gelding and Sleepy a long-legged sorrel, which a year before they had purchased as a racehorse, but which proved a failure. Sleepy had named it Calliope, because it was always behind the parade. Hashknife favored gray horses, because of their low visibility. A moving gray horse does not make a well defined target.

They were traveling slowly. The day was still an hour short of noon, and most of the grade was still in the shadow.

"I don't like this sheep business."

Sleepy had made that statement at regular intervals since they had ridden away from Teton Wells.

"You ain't in the sheep business," replied Hashknife.

"Jist as near as I ever want to be. Sheep always spells trouble."

"No trouble here, cowboy. Just a lot of busted cowboys. We can fix up this deal pretty quick and head out of the country. Westfield thought a lot of our ability, payin' us our money ahead of time. And we need that two hundred, Sleepy."

"Y'betcha we do," agreed Sleepy. "Looks like a million to me, and yuh can't settle this deal too soon to suit me."

They swung down around a sharp turn. Ahead of them they could see where the

road dipped around another curve and then climbed up around some sharp turns, cutting in above some towering cliffs. The road was only wide enough for one team, except at intervals, where turnouts had been built.

Suddenly they drew up. Above them, around one of the curves, came a running team of four horses, the brake blocks screaming a protest. It was just a glimpse of the rocking stage, lurching wildly around the curve, and then the heavy growth of piñon and manzanita cut off the view.

"Runaway!" snapped Hashknife. "Brakes won't hold!"

They whirled their horses around. They were still on the downgrade, which would be upgrade to the runaways. If the equipage stayed on the road until the upgrade there might be a chance to stop the team. At least the two cowboys could outrun it up the slopes.

Suddenly it shot into sight again, the leaders lurching into view, giving the two cowboys an underneath view of them as they swerved sharply, trying to keep on the grade. A wheeler swerved wildly to the outside, and it appeared as if all four of its feet were off the road. Then a hub on the stage crashed into a projecting rock, the vehicle skidded sickeningly, throwing rocks, gravel and dust off into the cañon.

Then it turned over sidewise, as if swinging on a swivel, and dropped off the grade, dragging the four horses with it. For a moment or two it seemed suspended in the air, horses kicking wildly, then shot straight for a big piñon thicket a hundred feet down the slope.

Both Hashknife and Sleepy turned their heads away and did not see the crash which came a moment later. When they looked again there was a great cloud of dust, and some of the little trees were whipping back and forth, as if in a heavy wind. Then came another crash, but this time it was much farther away.

"Good God!" panted Hashknife.

"And everythin' else!" snorted Sleepy. He wiped the back of his left hand across his eyes and began fumbling for his cigaret-papers.

"Didja see the driver?" asked Hashknife.

"He was on the seat, kinda leaning ahead, as though he was tryin' to gather up some slack on the lines."

They dismounted and dropped their reins, both horses being broke to stand with dragging rein, and found a place where they could slide over the edge of the grade.

It was a difficult place to go down, as there was little chance for a foothold. Each man picked his own way down, with Sleepy swinging far to the left side, while Hashknife went straight down toward the thicket. He found where the falling stage had gouged out a huge slice of the rough soil, and here he found the first evidences of the wreck, in the shape of a smashed box of canned peaches, a five-gallon can of kerosene, smashed open on a rock, a caddy of a well known brand of chewing tobacco.

Hashknife's heels skidded and he sat down, anchored himself against a small tree, which had been almost stripped of its foliage. At his right elbow was the caddy of tobacco, one top board torn loose, exposing part of the contents.

For several minutes Hashknife sat there, trying to figure out the best way to proceed down the hill. He swung the box around, and as he did so he happened to glance at the exposed contents. Then he reached inside the box and took out two paper-covered parcels which did not look at all like chewing-tobacco.

He stripped the cover off one and whistled softly in amazement. It was a package of currency, held in shape with a couple of small rubber bands. He stripped the covering off the other one and found the same thing.

For several moments he sat there staring at the money; the bills were of large denomination. Sleepy was calling to him below the thicket, so he shoved the two packages of bills inside his shirt, lifted the box on end and gave it a shove, sending it wheeling down the slope.

Then he eased his way down through the thicket to where Sleepy was sitting, possibly a hundred yards farther down the hill, studying the body of the driver, whose fall had been stopped by a gnarled manzanita bush.

"This feller's plenty dead," called Sleepy. "My God, what a header for a man to take!"

Hashknife slid down to him and made a quick examination. There was no doubt that the man was dead. His clothes were partly torn from his body. Hashknife managed to brace himself against the manzanita and turn the man over.

"I don't reckon he ever knew about the header," he said quickly. "He was dead before that stage went over the edge, Sleepy. Square between the eyes, they got him."

It was very true. Almost exactly between his eyes was a bullet hole, and at the crown of his head was the spot where the chunk of lead had made its exit. Hashknife squatted down and rolled a cigaret.

"No use lookin' at the horses, I suppose," he said.

"Not a bit," declared Sleepy. "They're a long ways down the hill yet. What'll we do about this poor feller?"

"Leave him here for the sheriff. My gosh, it's a climb to get back to that grade. It can't be so very far to Rainville."

They toiled back to their horses and sat down on the edge of the grade, almost exhausted. Sleepy swore softly as he mopped his brow with the sleeve of his shirt.

"Damn the luck! Allus have to run in to somethin'!"

Hashknife smiled, breathing heavily.

"Kinda pull yore cork, eh?" asked Sleepy.

"The old gray mare ain't what she used to be," laughed Hashknife, as he got to his feet. "Been livin' too easy."

They mounted and rode on. After they swung around above the big pinnacle, the road dipped sharply again. Hashknife rode slowly, reading the signs in the dust. He found where the stage had swerved sharply against the inner side of the grade, and there were wheel marks which indicated that the stage had backed, partly turned and had swung back again.

There were foot prints in the dirt, but none of them were clearly defined.

"Clever reasonin'," explained Hashknife. "From up here yuh can watch both ways, Sleepy. They were just around that turn, and when the stage came over the top they stepped out and stopped it. The horses got scared and whirled toward the bank, and then backed up; but it looks to me as though the holdup folks yanked 'em back."

"And then they shot the driver, eh?"

"Mebbe. He might have reached for a gun and they spotted him before the stage ever stopped. But that don't matter. He never knew what hit him—and that's a blessin'. Think of goin' off that grade with that stage, and havin' all yore faculties! No use jumpin', unless yuh could jump off the rear. And he wasn't reachin' for the lines, Sleepy."

"No, he shore wasn't. Young feller, too. By golly, this here Western country is gettin' too salty for me. If I ever get a chance, I'll buy an island, build a bull-tight fence around it and keep a policeman at the gate."

"I'll live with yuh," smiled Hashknife. "We'd shore do well. But before we do that, we've got to tell the sheriff all about what we saw out here."

"That'll be very nice, tall feller, but suppose the sheriff is a nosey sort of a person and don't understand how we happened to be along here about that time. If I had my way about it we'd high-tail it back over the divide, give Bill Westfield back his money and keep movin'."

"Oh, do you suppose that was a holdup?"

"Do I—what do yuh mean?"

"Looks like plain murder to me."

"Oh, that's worse'n ever. Git yore nose into a murder mess and—well, I dunno. Mebbe I'll let yuh on my island—mebbe not. You make me tired."

"Well, what have I done?"

"You *have* done a-plenty, Hashknife. But that don't interest me right now half as much as what yo're goin' to do."

"M-m-m-m. Say, it's a good thing we seen that stage go off the grade. They'd shore be stumped to find it, 'cause it went off on that tim-rock, and hardly made a scratch."

"That shore would have worried me all my life," declared Sleepy sarcastically.

He knew what was ahead of them; knew from the twitchings of Hashknife's nose that the lanky cowboy was itching to find out more about that stage.

"CHEERFUL CHARLEY" MILLER, Splinter Woods' deputy, had just returned from his honeymoon—alone. Cheerful was the prize pessimist of Rainville. He had married a waitress in the Rainville hotel, drew every cent he had saved and headed for Phoenix. It had been rather sudden. But Cheerful always did things suddenly.

He had been gone two weeks, and looked rather seedy when he walked down from the depot, entered the sheriff's office and threw his telescope-valise in a corner. He sat down heavily and considered the walrus-mustached sheriff, whose cigaret was already tainting the air with an odor of burning hair.

"Well, I'm back, Splint," he said contritely.

Splinter spat out his cigaret, sniffed disgustedly and felt of his upper-lip.

"Why don'ha cut that —— thing off?" asked Cheerful. "If yuh think it makes yuh handsome, yo're crazy"

Splinter coughed softly and glanced at the telescope.

"Came back alone," said Cheerful.

"Uh-huh. Broke, eh?"

"What makes yuh think I'm broke?"

"Jist lookin' at yuh, Cheerful. Tell Uncle Splinter."

"A-a-aaw, hell!"

"Benedict, or Benedict Arnold?"

"I'm as single as a horse-pistol."

"Uh-huh. Accident or intent."

"Huh!" Cheerful lighted a badly shaped tailor-made cigaret and leaned back in his chair.

"We was happy," he said slowly.

"You was, yuh mean. No damn woman—"

"Wait a minute! *We* was happy, I said. Everythin' was as slick as grease. We had one of them flats, they call 'em. Genevieve said we'd save money thataway. She was a great hand to save, so she was. She was doin' the cookin'. One day she went out to buy a loaf of bread—and she never came back."

"Never came back, Cheerful?"

"Never saw hide nor hair of her since. Waited four days. By God, yuh can't expect a man to wait mor'n four days for a loaf of bread, can yuh?"

"I never have, Cheerful."

"Neither have I."

"And she had all yore money?"

"Yo're a mind-readin' fool, Splinter."

"How didja git back?"

"Freight trains mostly. I ain't had much to eat."

"Didn't yuh eat while yuh was waitin' for that bread?"

"Yo're as funny as ever. Lend me a dollar. How's crime?"

Splinter dug down in his pocket and tossed the required amount to Cheerful.

"Ain't been none since Genevieve married you."

"How do yuh make that out a crime?"

"Obtainin' yore bankroll under false pretenses."

"She said she loved me," gloomily.

"And you was optimist enough to believe her."

"What's an optimist, Splinter?"

"A damn fool that don't believe what he sees in a mirror."

Cheerful sighed. He was too hungry to argue further.

"Goin' to eat," he said, as he got up and moved to the door. "Git a dollar's worth of ham and aigs under my belt and feel better."

"Do yuh still love her?" asked Splinter.

"In spite of anythin'," declared Cheerful. "Why, Splinter, that woman shore fooled me."

"Yeah, I reckon she did, Cheerful. She told me *you* went out after that loaf of bread, got drunk and forgot to come home. And after four days of waitin', she packed up and came back to her old job. She's at the Rainville dinin'-room, waitin' for you to come back."

Cheerful stared at Splinter, his mouth opening by degrees until it was wide open. Cheerful had a generous mouth, too. In fact all of Cheerful's features were generous, especially his mouth, nose and ears. His neck wasn't much to speak about. Nature had been generous in giving him great length of arm and torso, but had rather fallen down in the matter of underpinning.

"Hol-ee gee!" he gasped, as soon as he was able to shut his mouth. "Genevieve here?" He leaned weakly against the side of the door.

"You must have been pretty drunk, Cheerful."

"Yeah," weakly. "Yuh see it was thisaway, Splinter. All them damn flats looked alike. I got in the wrong one. It shore looked like mine. I was pretty well organized about that time, and I yells, 'Come kiss yore honey boy!' "

Cheerful swallowed thickly.

"Like I just said, it must have been the wrong flat. A big son-of-a-gun knocked me plumb back to the nearest saloon, and I didn't see anythin' for hours and hours. I didn't remember the number of our flat, and it wouldn't 'a' done me no good if I did, 'cause I'd forgot the name of the street; so I—I picked me a fight and got throwed in jail. Had to have a place to sleep, and Genevieve had all the money—except the two bits I had to buy bread with. Yeah, I saved that much. Stuck it down in my boot the first day, in case I remembered where I lived."

Splinter smoothed his mustache over a smile.

"She'll forgive yuh, Cheerful."

"Yuh think so?" hopefully. "Well, if she don't I can't be any more single than I am. She's got a mind of her own."

Cheerful leaned his shoulder against the doorframe and looked up the street. He had lost some of his appetite. Hashknife and Sleepy were coming straight down the middle of the street, and Cheerful squinted against the light at them.

"Couple of strange punchers," said Cheerful. "Actin' as though they was in a hurry."

Splinter got to his feet and came to the doorway as the two cowboys drew up their horses.

"Sheriff?" asked Hashknife shortly.

"I'm him," said Splinter.

"Good. The stage runs from here to the Ironclad mine, don't it?"

"Yeah."

"Well, it's piled up in the bottom of the cañon. Went off the grade above them big pinnacles—up there where the road pitches to the east."

"The hell yuh say! Wh-when did this happen?"

"We just came from there."

"My God! You didn't go down to it, didja?"

"Went down far enough to find the driver. He's dead."

"Paul Vetter! My gosh, that's awful! Killed him, eh?"

"He was dead before he fell. Bullet—square between the eyes."

"Hu-u-u-uh?" The sheriff's mouth remained open.

"Sombody shot him?" gasped Cheerful.

"Didn't look like suicide," said Hashknife.

"Holee-e-e Je-hovah!" snorted Cheerful.

"Saddle the horses!" snapped the sheriff, who had managed to shut his mouth. "Both of 'em, Cheerful. Make it fast. C'mon and tell it to Peter Guest, strangers."

Hashknife and Sleepy left their horses and followed the sheriff, who ran heavily up the street. The appearance of three men running up the street caused folks to come out to investigate, and some of them joined the slow race.

Peter Guest looked up from his desk, and his face grew white as the sheriff blurted out the news. But his jaw tightened and he got up, walked to the rear of

the room and began putting on a rusty black coat, although the temperature was at least a hundred in the shade.

Look like a holdup to you, Peter?" asked the sheriff.

"There was over fourteen thousand dollars in the money box," said Guest hoarsely. "And they killed poor Paul Vetter. Oh, that was bad! I'll go with you, Sheriff."

"You didn't see the money-box, didja?" asked the sheriff. Hashknife shook his head.

"We never got down to the stage."

"It was about this big," said Guest nervously.

He indicated a size that could be anywhere from eighteen inches to three feet in length, and from a foot to three feet in width.

"Locked?" asked the sheriff.

"Certainly. But what good would that do? Locks break. I'll have to get a horse and buggy."

"Better take plenty of rope," advised Hashknife. "It's a steep climb."

Guest hurried to the livery-stable, and in a few minutes Cheerful brought two saddled horses to the front of the bank. Hashknife noticed that the sheriff had been rather speculative in his glances toward him and Sleepy, and was not surprized when the sheriff said—

"You boys won't mind goin' back there with us, will yuh?"

"No-o-o-o," replied Hashknife. "It'll take about five of us to put that body back on the grade; and if yuh want to get down to the stage, yuh better get a mighty long rope."

"Uh-huh. I'll load up Guest's buggy."

Booze Haverty, of the Circle Star, and Tonto Potts, of the Tumbling R, volunteered their sevices, and were taken along. Potts was a scrawny specimen of cowboy —ignorant, narrow between the eyes and running pretty much to large knuckles.

The six riders arrived there far ahead of Peter Guest, but were obliged to wait for the ropes before making any attempt to reach the body. Hashknife described the runaway, and the sheriff made a minute examination of the spot where the holdup ocurred.

As soon as Peter Guest arrived they unloaded the huge coil of rope, tied one end to a mazanita at the edge of the grade and made their way down to the body. The sheriff's examination was very brief; finally they succeeded in getting the body back to the grade.

Tonto Potts managed to get far enough down the slope to report that he could see all four horses, which were dead, and the stage, all smashed to pieces.

"Yuh ought to look for that money-box," said Hashknife.

"Yeah, I reckon that's right," admitted the sheriff.

Tonto thought he could reach the bottom from where he had stopped, with the aid of the rope; so he and the sheriff and Cheerful made the attempt. Peter Guest had little to say, and after the three men had gone down the hill, and Booze Haverty was talking with Sleepy, Hashknife told Guest that Bill Westfield had sent them over to get prices on the AH and the Circle Star ranches.

The old man squinted narrowly at Hashknife.

"Sheep-men?" he asked.

"Nope, just doin' Westfield a favor."

"I see."

The old man shifted his gaze and appeared to be studying the proposition. From far below them came the sheriff's voice:

"You will like hell; you stay here! There's fourteen thousand in that money-box, if it ain't missin',"

Hashknife grinned. He was surprized that Tonto Potts had offered to go down the rope to the stage.

"Well, you'll have to see those ranches," said Peter Guest. "I never made Westfield any prices. If I was in your place, I wouldn't tell who I was working for. It won't be hard for you to find both places."

"I hear that the cattlemen have had a hard time here."

"Yes, pretty hard. It's time something else was done. The sheep would bring prosperity again."

"You've been here about five years, I hear?"

The old man looked up quickly, his small eyes boring into Hashknife's face.

"Well?"

"You've done pretty well."

"Have I?"

"They say you have. Come here from the East?"

"Yes. What made you think I did?"

"I dunno—just guessed. Did this stage-driver have any enemies?"

"Paul Vetter? Not that I ever heard about. He's been driving stage for me for over a year. Good man."

"Was he carryin' the payroll of the Ironclad?"

"Yes."

"First time you've had a holdup?"

"First time. What's all these questions for?"

"Killin' time, I suppose," smiled Hashknife. "Suspect anybody?"

Peter Guest shook his head slowly.

"If I did, I would not tell you."

"I suppose not."

That rather ended the conversation. Sleepy and Booze sat down with them, and in a few minutes they heard the three men coming back. The sheriff's face was streaked with perspiration and dirt, his clothes dirty and torn.

"Got down there," he panted. "My God, that stage shore is a wreck. But there's no sign of the money-box, Guest. I looked all through it, and up and down the cañon. I reckon they got it."

Peter Guest nodded sadly, and, after turning the team around, they loaded the body of Paul Vetter into the buggy. The old man's jaw was set and his face grim as he drove back down the grade with a dead man at his side, the sheriff and Hashknife riding just ahead of him.

"I talked with the old man," said Hashknife, "but he ain't very long on conversation."

Splinter Wood shook his head.

"Never did talk much. I'll betcha the the loss of that money is breakin' his heart. He hates money."

"Were you here when Peter Guest came to Rainville?"

"Yeah, I was foreman of the old Double Diamond."

"He bought out the bank, didn't he?"

"Yeah. It was a private proposition, so he didn't have much trouble. It never did make much money."

"Where'd the old boy come from?"

"I never heard."

"Just came in and bought out a bank that wasn't makin' money eh?"

"Well, I never thought about it that way—possibly he did."

"How'd he get the Ironclad?"

"Grubstaked old Jimmy Condon. He was a queer old prospector. Peter Guest grubstaked him, and on his first trip he found the Ironclad. They opened it up enough to prove it was worth a lot of money. Then him and Jimmy quarreled over it. They wouldn't speak to each other.

"Finally they got a little sense over the matter, and Jimmy sold out to Peter for ten thousand dollars. I saw the money paid over to Jimmy. He was a drinkin' fool, and two days after he got that money we found him in a prospect hole, where he had fallen, dead as a nail. In his pocket was two twenty-dollar bills and a bank book from the Rainsville bank showin' a deposit of five thousand dollars. He didn't have any relatives, as far as we know, and the bank book with the forty dollars is locked up in the county treasurer's safe, waitin' for a relative to show up and prove who they are."

"And that gave Peter Guest ownership of the Ironclad, eh?"

"Oh, sure; and he got it dirt cheap. That payroll wouldn't faze him, as far as loss is concerned. He's rich. Not only in that, but he owns the AH, Double Diamond and the Circle Star ranches."

"Got any relatives?"

"About as many as Jimmy Condon had, I reckon."

"Got any idea who might have pulled this job?"

The sheriff shook his head quickly.

"Not any. Nothin' to work on, as far

as I can see. Just have to wait and see what happens."

He did not ask any questions as to who Hashknife and Sleepy were, nor where they were going. He was satisfied that this level-eyed cowboy and his grinning companion had nothing to do with the murder and robbery, and that was enough for him.

They rode into Rainville, where Hashknife and Sleepy stabled their horses and secured a room at the Rainville hotel. The little town buzzed with excitement over the murder, and there were all kinds of conjectures.

Friday Jones, Andy Peterson and Harry McCall were in from the Double Diamond, getting an earful; and Hashknife heard Friday Jones tell some one that it might be worth the sheriff's while to investigate Bull Hampton.

A little later Hashknife met the sheriff in front of the hotel and asked him who Bull Hampton was. The sheriff looked keenly at Hashknife, grunted softly as if slightly amused.

"Bull? Oh, he's one of our bad boys. Just got back from a two-year residence at the pen. Shot an unarmed man. His dad owns the AH ranch. What about him?"

"Oh, nothin'—I just heard his name mentioned."

"Yuh prob'ly would," nodded the sheriff. "Give a dog a bad name, yuh know."

"Sure. How do yuh get out to the AH ranch, sheriff?"

"Head out that end of town and take the road to the left. You—uh—"

The sheriff hesitated. He came near asking Hashknife what he wanted at the AH ranch. Hashknife thanked him and went on, leaving the sheriff a bit puzzled. Finally the sheriff went back to his office, where he found Cheerful tilted back against the wall, puffing on a cigaret.

"You must be hungry," said the sheriff.

Cheerful looked up at him.

"I reckon I've got dyspepsia, Splinter. I gits me a pang of hunger and starts for the hotel, and then I thinks of that damn loaf of bread, and it takes away my appetite. I'm gittin' as ga'nt as a shadder. Mebbe I better git me a few drinks."

Cheerful got to his feet, dusted off his knees and went straight toward the Peacock saloon. Genevieve would weigh close to two hundred pounds and hated a drinking man, but Cheerful wanted to be partly numb in body when he started in to explain why he never came back with the bread.

BULL HAMPTON did not tell his father and mother of the trouble he had had in Rainville with the sheriff, Peterson and McCall. He expected the sheriff to make an attempt to arrest him for resisting an officer. The day of the robbery and murder of Paul Vetter, Bull had saddled a horse and ridden back on the breaks of Hangman Creek, taking a rifle with him, which he hid under the floor of an old cabin.

Bull felt that sooner or later he would have trouble with Friday Jones and his gang, and he wanted a rifle where he could pick it up. He was sure that no matter whether he was right or wrong, the law would decide against him, because of his past record. Dad Hampton noticed that Bull came back without the rifle, but did not question him about it.

The following morning they were finishing breakfast when Haskhife and Sleepy rode up to the ranch-house. Dad Hampton met them at the front porch and asked them to have breakfast.

"Ma will fry yuh some eggs and bacon," he told them, in spite of their protests.

He herded them into the kitchen, where Bull sat at the table. Ma Hampton wiped a hand on her apron and shook hands with them, without any introduction.

"It won't take a minute to get you some breakfast," she insisted. "Just set right down at the table."

"Now, wait a minute," laughed Hashknife. "My name's Hartley and my pardner is named Stevens. You folks are named Hampton, so we're all even."

Bull got up and held out his hand.

"Glad to meet yuh, boys. Strangers, eh?"

"Came in yesterday; just in time to see the stage go off the Ironclad road, and later we found the driver. Vetter, I think his name is."

"What's all this yo're talkin' about?" asked Bull.

Hashknife explained what had happened.

"Murder and robbery!" exclaimed Ma Hampton horrified.

Dad Hampton's eyes left Hashknife's face and looked at Bull, who had leaned back against the wall, his eyes hardening perceptibly. Bull knew what his father was thinking; it was about that hidden rifle. Ma Hampton bustled around the stove.

"Set down," said the old man thickly. "You say that the Ironclad payroll was taken?"

"Over fourteen thousand," said Hashknife.

"And poor Paul Vetter was killed," said Ma sadly. "We knew Paul. Oh, that was a terrible thing to do."

"It's time old Pete Guest lost somethin'," said Bull bitterly. "He's had it pretty soft."

"Thou shalt not covet," said Ma softly, piling food on Hashknife's plate.

"I'm not covetin', Ma; I'm statin' a fact."

"It wasn't a nice thing to say before strangers, son."

"Oh, I know. If yuh get one cheek slapped, turn the other."

Bull got to his feet.

"You folks excuse me," he said slowly. "I've got to water the horses."

"Shore," smiled Hashknife. "Go right ahead."

Hashknife noticed that the old man's eyes followed Bull's broad back until the door shut behind him. Ma Hampton put more food on the table, filled their cups, and then sat down at the table.

"You mustn't pay any attention to Bull," she said. "His bark is much worse than his bite."

"Thasall right," smiled Hashknife. "Gee, this is good food. They don't feed so good at the Railville hotel."

"It always tastes better at home," said Dad.

"That's the truth," agreed Sleepy quickly. "Nothin' is ever as good anywhere as it is at home."

"You boys just ridin' through?" queried Dad.

"Yuh might say we are," said Hashknife. "We heard that some of the ranches around here were for sale, so we're kinda lookin' around. Know anythin' about prices around here?"

There was silence for several moments, and Hashknife stole a glance at the two old folks, who were looking at each other. And the expression of their faces told him more than words could ever tell.

"I was thinkin' about the Circle Star," he said.

"The Circle Star?" said Dad slowly. "You turned the wrong way when yuh came out of town. You should have turned to the right."

"Yeah, I knowed it the minute we came," said Hashknife. "They told us there wasn't no women at the Circle Star."

"Just three men," said Dad. "But I—I don't want to misrepresent things. This ranch belongs to Peter Guest, and he wants to sell it. We're just livin' here, yuh see—me and Ma and Bull—just until it's sold."

Hashknife drank his coffee slowly.

"We had hard luck," said Dad. "Borrowed money to buy stock, which got froze up in the winter. And then the drouth hit us. Couldn't make a go of it—none of us did. Peter Guest owns mostly everythin'."

"I heard he did," nodded Hashknife. "You been here long?"

"I settled on this ranch about fifty years ago. Me and Ma had just been married. We came here with ox-teams—the first white settlers in the valley. And we've stuck—until just now. We've worked hard, boys."

"But you mustn't blame Peter Guest," said Ma quickly. "We owed the money

honestly. He loses, too. I'm sorry about that part of it."

"Yes, he'll lose," sighed Dad. "It ain't worth the mortgage—to him. We feel different, of course."

"It's been home so long," said Ma dismally.

Hashknife and Sleepy got up from the table, and Hashknife held out his hand to the old lady.

"That's the finest breakfast I ever ate," he declared. "I shore thank yuh, Ma Hampton."

"My Lord, what for? A body has to eat."

"Yeah, I know; it's a failin' of the human race."

Ma Hampton smiled and shook hands with Sleepy.

"You boys ain't goin' back so soon, are yuh?" asked Dad. "Why don'tcha spend the day with us?"

"We'd like to, y'betcha," said Hashknife. "But we've got to keep movin'. We'll be in Rainville a few days, and mebbe we'll see yuh again."

"Come any time," urged Ma. "We'll be glad to see you. Did you say your name was Hartley? A Hartley married an aunt of mine. You don't favor him none. He was short and fat."

"I'd like to see him," grinned Hashknife. "I never seen one that wasn't long-legged and half-starved. I thought it was a peculiarity of the breed. A fat Hartley would shore be worth lookin' at."

They laughed and walked out on the porch.

"Well, bless my soul! More company!" exclaimed Ma.

The sheriff and deputy were dismounting near the porch. Dad glanced apprehensively toward the stable, but there was no sign of Bull.

"Howdy folks," greeted the sheriff. "How are yuh all?"

"Splinter Woods and Cheerful Miller," laughed Ma Hampton. "Come in and have breakfast."

"Thank yuh kindly," smiled the sheriff. "We had breakfast in town."

He eyed Hashknife and Sleepy.

"Rode kinda early didn't yuh?" he asked.

"Not for us," grinned Hashknife. "We're in the habit of usin' quite a lot of daylight."

"Oh, yeah."

He turned to Dad Hampton.

"You heard what happened yesterday, didn't yuh?"

"Mr. Hartley told us. We didn't know until then."

"Well, they knew all about it; they saw some of it. Where's Bull?"

"Bull? I dunno, Splinter. He was here a while ago. What do yuh want him for?"

"Nothin' much, Dad. I'm just kinda checkin' up on everybody, and I'd like to know where Bull was at that time."

"Oh!" Dad turned his eyes away. "Well, I—I suppose Bull can tell yuh, Splinter."

"Now, look here, Dad," said the sheriff quickly. "Don't get the idea I'm accusin' Bull, 'cause I ain't."

He shifted his eyes and looked at Hashknife.

"There's times when I hate this darn job of mine, Hartley."

"I know how yuh feel," replied Hashknife.

"I'm not blamin' yuh," said Dad slowly. "It's what they elected yuh for, Splinter."

"But Bull didn't—why, he couldn't have been mixed up in anything like that," declared Ma Hampton. "That's ridiculous."

"Yeah, that's a fact," admitted Splinter. "Bull's sore at me, and he figures I'm sore at him. But that ain't true. This is goin' to make him feel that I'm puttin' the deadwood on him, because he's been in trouble before. But all I want is to know where he was yesterday when that stage was held up."

"He can prob'ly tell yuh," said Dad dubiously. "I dunno where he is; he left just after breakfast."

"Uh-huh."

The sheriff shifted his feet and looked toward the stable.

"Well, I'll tell yuh what to do, Dad.

When Bull comes home, you tell him to ride in and see me, will yuh?"

"Sure. He'll be glad to come in, Splinter."

"Mm-m-m-m. Well, I hope he will, Dad."

"If yo're goin' back to town, we'll ride back with yuh," said Hashknife.

"Yeah, we're goin' back, Hartley."

Hashknife and Sleepy shook hands with the old folks, promised to come again in case they spent a few days in the valley and rode away with the two officers. Hashknife noticed that Cheerful had a discolored optic and a scratch on the bridge of his nose.

The sheriff had nothing to say until they were well away from the ranch, when he moved in close beside Hashknife.

"Bull was there at the ranch, wasn't he, Hartley?"

"I can't swear where he was," replied Hashknife. "He went out to water the horses when we sat down to breakfast."

"Uh-huh. I saw the old man look toward the stable. What do yuh think of it?"

"I'm in no position to do any thinkin', Sheriff."

"No, I suppose not."

The sheriff would have given much to know just why these two strangers had ridden out to the AH so early in the morning, and what they were doing in Blue Joint Valley. But Splinter Woods was entirely ethical, as far as minding his own business was concerned.

"I suppose I should have gone down there and found him," he said. "That would have been the right thing to do."

"Seems that way to me," replied Hashknife.

"Yeah, it would. But you don't know Bull Hampton. He's what you'd call a real sudden person. And he's sore at the law. I don't blame him much. Sometimes I wonder if there wasn't a lot of lyin' done at his trial. Friday Jones is a tough *hombre*. Bull knocked him down in a dance-hall. Now, Friday had a gun on him at that time; and it don't strike me that Friday is the sort of a jigger to take off his gun right after a man hit him.

"It wasn't over fifteen minutes later that Bull downed him—plugged him through the shoulder—in front of a store. And there was three witnesses to swear that Friday was unarmed and never said anythin' to Bull. They swore he left his gun in Bill Freeman's room at the hotel."

"Who is Bill Freeman?"

"Cashier at the bank. It was his testimony that really cinched Bull. And since Bull came back he's whipped Friday Jones, scared the wits out of Peterson and McCall and hit me in the jaw so hard that I took a ride on a sky-rocket."

"Well!" laughed Hashknife. "I'll say he's sudden."

"Yeah, and I'm not sore about that punch in the jaw."

"Forgivin' disposition, eh?"

"Not exactly. But I was wrong, I reckon."

"This original trouble started over a girl, didn't it?"

"Yeah, Millicent Reid. Bull took her to the dance that night, and the trouble started when she refused to dance with Friday Jones, who was pretty drunk."

"She was Bull's girl, eh?"

"Kinda. I don't think they were engaged. She went with Bill Freeman once in a while. But since Bull has been in the pen she ain't been goin' with anybody. Her father owns the Tumblin' R."

"That's one that Peter Guest don't own, eh?"

"Well, I wouldn't go so far as to say that."

"Friday Jones is Guest's foreman, eh?"

"Yeah—at the Double Diamond."

"And he's got Peterson and McCall workin' for him—two of the men who testified against Bull Hampton."

"That's right. Say—" The sheriff swung sidewise in his saddle and looked quizzically at Hashknife. "What's the idea of all these questions, Hartley?"

"Wantin' to know things, I suppose."

"Uh-huh."

They rode along in silence, while behind came Cheerful and Sleepy.

"And then I got drunk," Cheerful was saying. "I mostly always do get drunk

when I've got somethin' on my mind."

"Kind of an annual drinker, eh?" observed Sleepy, but the sarcasm was lost on Cheerful, who continued:

"But I got me a loaf of bread. Yeah, I shore did. Had to hunt all over town for one. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Took it into the dinin' room, and there stood Genevieve. I walks right up and handed it to her. I says, 'Here's the bread, sweetheart.'

"Just like that. 'Here's the bread, sweetheart.' I'm a pretty good actor, if I do say it myself. She took the bread, put it on a table beside her, and I says to myself, 'Cheerful, you shore got off cheap—she believes in yuh.'

"And then she hit me right in the eye with a soup-bowl. Zowie! I lit settin' down, and she says:

" 'There's your change.' Jist like that. Ha-ha-ha-ha! But everythin' is all right now. Yuh see, I ain't never been married before. It's like hitchin' up a wild horse. He don't know what yuh want him to do, so he don't do it."

"And if yuh knock him down a few times, he gets wise," said Sleepy seriously.

"Yea-a-ah, that's true. You've been married, ain't yuh?"

"Not yet."

"Well, it's great to have somebody take an interest in yuh. I wasn't much good before I got married, but it shore straightened me out."

"You got everythin' fixed up, did yuh, Cheerful?" asked the sheriff.

"Well, I think so," seriously. "I ain't seen her since she hit me. That ought to make us even. I don't hold no grudge."

Hashknife and Sleepy did not ride into town with the officers, but declared their intention of going to the Circle Star ranch. The sheriff gave them their directions, and continued on into town with Cheerful, who was broad-minded enough to not hold any grudge against his wife.

The sheriff went up to the bank; there Freeman told him that Peter Guest, Friday Jones, Peterson and McCall had gone to the wrecked stage to salvage what they could. They had taken a team and light wagon from the livery-stable.

The sheriff went back down the street to the court-house; he talked with Frank Baker, the portly prosecutor of Blue Joint County, who chewed tobacco industriously and listened to the sheriff closely.

"Nothin' to base an arrest on," he told the sheriff, when Bull Hampton's name was brought into the conversation. "I'm more interested in these two strange cowboys. It's queer that they should happen along about that time and see all this. What have you found out from them?"

"Not a thing, Frank. The tall one asks more questions than he answers. I found 'em at the AH ranch this mornin'. Must have started early from here. They've gone to the Circle Star now—or said they were goin'."

"Mm-m-m-m. Had any talk with Peter Guest?"

"Nothin' of any importance. He's out there now, tryin' to save somethin' from the wreck."

"If you see Guest, tell him to come and see me. I want to get his version of all this. Darned old fool! He ought to know better than to send money that way. There's lots of folks in this valley that would look pretty hard at that much money."

"That's true. I'll see what I can find out about these two strangers, Frank."

As the sheriff was leaving the court-house he met Peter Guest. The old banker was dusty, one pant-knee torn badly, and he limped painfully.

"You must have slipped," said the sheriff.

"Slipped? Yes, I slipped several times. Come back to Baker's office with me."

They walked back to the office, and Baker seemed a little amused at Peter Guest's appearance.

"I've been out to the wreck," said Peter. "Now I want to know what you fellows have done toward findin' the men who killed my driver and took my money?"

"It seems to me that there's very little to work on," observed Baker.

"Is that so?" Peter's voice was harshly shrill. "I lost over fourteen thousand

dollars—and you've got nothing to work on! Where are the two men who—Hartley and Stevens, I think they call themselves?"

"They've gone out to the Circle Star," said the sheriff.

"Have, eh? Probably never come back."

"What if they don't?" snapped the sheriff.

"What if they don't?" mimicked the banker. "What do you know about 'em? How did they happen to see all this? If you had any sense you'd have 'em in jail right now."

"Wait a minute," said Baker briskly. "You're talking too fast, Mr. Guest. What evidence have you got against these two men, outside of the fact that they happened to come along at that time? You can't make an arrest on such evidence. There's nothing to connect them with the robbery, except that you want to fasten it on some one."

"Do you have to wait until they confess?" snapped Guest. "They could be going around with that money in their pockets, for all you know."

"Exactly," nodded Baker.

"Then, why don't you do something?"

"Are you sure they've got it in their pockets?" smiled the attorney.

"I'm not a fool, Frank Baker! I'm willing to swear out a warrant for their arrest."

The prosecuting attorney shook his head.

"Not on such flimsy evidence, Mr. Guest. You haven't enough evidence to warrant an investigation."

"No?" Peter Guest caressed a sore knee, his thin face twisted painfully. "What protection is the law, anyway?"

"You never asked for any protection," reminded the sheriff. "You sent that money to the Ironclad, just like you've been sendin' it for a long time; but this time it didn't get there."

The old banker got up and walked out, without saying a word. He slammed the door and went limping down the hall, while the prosecutor and the sheriff grinned at each other.

"Pretty sore," said the sheriff yawning. "Acts a lot more upset than he was yesterday."

Peter Guest was sore. He limped up the street and went into his stage office, which was connected with the bank by a side door. He sat down, nursing his knee. For at least fifteen minutes he sat there alone, his eyes half-closed.

Then he went through the door into the bank, where Bill Freeman was working on the books. There was no one else in the bank. Freeman nodded to Guest, as he came in beside the desk. For several minutes there was no sound except the dull scratching of pen on paper. Peter Guest leaned his elbows on the desk, deep in thought. Then—

"Freeman, you never did see me make up that payroll, did you?"

Freeman looked up quickly and shook his head.

"I know you didn't," said Guest slowly. "I just had a talk with the prosecutor and sheriff."

"What do they know?"

"Nothing. I want to tell you something, Freeman. That payroll never went to the Ironclad in the money-box."

Freeman looked queerly at him.

"That was just a dummy roll," continued Guest, dropping his voice to a whisper. "Yesterday the money was packed in a box of chewing tobacco. I took out enough tobacco to put in the money and nailed the cover on. Today—" Peter Guest swallowed heavily—"today I found the box of tobacco down in the bottom of the cañon. The strip of cover that was over the money is gone, but the tobacco is still there."

"And the money was gone?" asked Freeman.

Peter Guest nodded slowly. Freeman's face twisted thoughtfully, calculatingly.

"Maybe the holdup men found this out," he said.

"And maybe not, Freeman. Those two men—Hartley and Stevens—were on the spot right away. Near where they found Paul Vetter's body, I found that piece of box-cover. It was just up the hill from

there, and at the same spot was a case of peaches and a can of kerosene."

"You think they accidentally found the money?"

"How else? But there's no evidence. Don't say anything about this, Freeman. We'll have to watch these men."

"Sure," muttered Freeman.

He watched Peter Guest go back to his private office, and the cashier's face was a queer mixture of emotions as he turned back to his work.

Hashknife and Sleepy did not find any one at the Circle Star ranch, so they rode back to Rainville at supper time, and ate at the hotel dining-room. Booze Haverty, of the Circle Star, came in and sat down at their table. Booze had been imbibing his namesake and was inclined to be loquacious.

"Lotta talk about the killin' of Vetter," he volunteered. "Everybody's got a swell idea how it happened. They blame everybody from a Swiss shepherd to the Marines."

Hashknife laughed with Booze.

"What's yore theory?" asked Hashknife.

"Mine? Huh! Say!" He leaned across the table and lowered his voice. "Didja know old Peter Guest tried to get the sheriff to arrest you two fellers today?"

Hashknife's smile faded quickly.

" 'S a fact," nodded Booze. "Baker, the prosecutor, told Dan McKinley about it, and Dan told me. I was told not to tell."

"You didn't," said Hashknife solemnly. "Peter Guest didn't have much luck, did he?"

"Wasn't enough evidence. Baker's a square-shooter. Him and the sheriff are two men Peter Guest can't run any blazers on. Old Pete thinks it's kinda funny you two were there. Personally, I don't like murders, but that much money is shore worth gettin' in this day and age."

Hashknife didn't tell Booze that he and Sleepy were down at the Circle Star that afternoon.

"Old Pete told the sheriff that you fellers might be runnin' around with all that money in yore pockets, for all anybody knew."

Sleepy laughed, but Hashknife didn't. Inside his shirt he still had those two packages of currency. If the sheriff should experience a change of heart, their cake would be all dough, as the saying goes. With the exact amount of the Ironclad payroll as evidence against them, nothing short of a miracle would save them from hanging for murder.

Hashknife had not told Sleepy about the money. Something had told him to hang on to that roll for a while. Not that Hashknife had any intentions of stealing it; but he was a trifle curious to know just why that money was packed in the tobacco caddy. But right now he wished it were in a safer place, and he knew of no place to conceal it.

Hashknife and Sleepy left the dining-room and went to their room. It was on the second story of the old building, and had one outside window.

"When are yuh goin' to make old Pete an offer?" asked Sleepy.

"I dunno, Sleepy—why?"

"I'd like to get out of here, that's why. Yuh never can tell what might happen. It's all right to put yore nose on a crime trail, when yore own hide ain't givin' off the scent—but when it does, that's different."

"Makes yuh work harder, Sleepy."

"Yea-a-ah, and it might make yuh run faster, too."

They sat around in their room until about eight o'clock, and then they went over to the Peacock gambling house. They were just a little surprized to find Peter Guest in a draw poker game. He nodded pleasantly enough. There was an extra seat, which Sleepy appropriated; he still had a few dollars. Hashknife lounged around the place for a while. After some time Peter Guest cashed in his winnings.

"You can have my seat," he told Hashknife. "It's lucky."

Hashknife thanked him for the chance, and moved over to the table, but did not sit down. As soon as Peter Guest left the place, Hashknife went out, crossed the

street to the hotel and went up the stairs. The lobby was merely a little hall, with doors leading to the dining-room, lower hallways and the stair landing. It was seldom that any one was in the lobby, and he went up unobserved.

He unlocked the door of his room, locked it from the inside and took out the key. Then he sat down, took off his boots in the darkness and waited. There were no lights in the hallway, and the window looked out upon an unlighted area.

He had not been there over ten minutes when he heard the sound of footsteps in the hallway. The old boards creaked loudly, and the footsteps halted at his door. Came the soft rattle at the lock, as some one worked diligently with several keys, finally finding one that worked.

The door swung open, letting in a man, and closed. There was no attempt to lock the door. Hashknife could not see the man, but heard him moving softly around. The table creaked, and a moment later a match flared up as the man removed the lamp chimney.

It was Peter Guest, his thin face yellow in the lamplight. He lighted the wick, replaced the chimney and turned his head to see Hashknife sitting in a chair, covering him with a heavy Colt gun. To the credit of Peter Guest, it may be said that he did not squeal. He looked straight at the gun muzzle, the pupils of his eyes dilating a little.

"You got into the wrong room, didn't yuh?" asked Hashknife casually.

Peter Guest continued to stare silently.

"It was nice of yuh to give me yore chair," said Hashknife. "It assured yuh a chance to get in this room alone."

Peter cleared his throat softly, but did not speak. Hashknife indicated the other chair with a flirt of his gun.

"Set down, old-timer. Keep yore hands on the lap, will yuh? No, I'm not goin' to search yuh. If you've got a stinger, you can keep it, you old scorpion! By rights, I ought to plug yuh for burglary. Loosen up yore neck and talk a little."

Peter Guest sat down and put his hands on his knees. He was taking no further chances.

"No use saying it was a mistake, I suppose," he said.

"Not a bit. What was you lookin' for?"

"What did you think I was lookin' for?"

Hashknife laughed at the old man.

"You burgle like a professional, Peter Guest. I wonder if this is yore first attempt. Pretty cool customer. Most fellers would have tried to lie or to beg their way out. But you look square into the muzzle of a gun."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Gosh, I dunno. I ought to turn yuh over to the sheriff, like you tried to do me today."

"Yes?" Peter scowled. "Might not have been far wrong, at that."

"All wrong, Peter Guest. I never even knew there was a stage line to the Ironclad. We're just what we said we were, but after you tryin' to implicate us in this, I felt sure you'd search our stuff, tryin' to put the deadwood on us."

"What did you think I'd find?"

"Nothin', Peter. But I don't like to have folks pawin' over my things."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"I swear I don't know. Yo're a puzzle, Peter. The richest man in the country, tryin' to burgle the room of a couple of poor cowpunchers. That would sound nice to the folks. In fact, I reckon there's folks in this valley that would be mighty glad to hear about it."

Peter Guest winced. He realized it, too. Hashknife, suddenly imbued with an idea, reached in his pocket and took out an old note-book and stub of a pencil. He placed them on the table.

"Find a clean page in there, Peter," he said. "That's my autograph album, and I want this to remember yuh by. Pick it up; it won't bite yuh."

The old banker opened the book to a blank page, looking wonderingly at Hashknife.

"All set?" asked Hashknife. "Fine.

Now write this: I hereby admit that—"

"I'll be damned if I do!" snarled Peter Guest.

"And you'll be worse damned if you don't! Write what I tell you to or I'll hammer yuh on the floor until I attract the attention of everybody in this hotel! Then I'll turn yuh over to the sheriff. Now write!"

Peter Guest knew human nature well enough to know that this lean-faced, cold-eyed cowboy would keep his word. He wrote a line in the book.

I hereby admit that I entered Hashknife Hartley's room at the Rainville hotel, with the intention of burglary.

"Got that? Now date it and sign yore name. Fine."

Hashknife picked up the book. Peter Guest had written it, and signed his name at the bottom. Even with the old pencil the writing was almost as clean-cut as copper-plate script.

"You shore write a nice hand," observed Hashknife, as he pocketed the book. "Now you can rattle yore hocks out of here as fast as yuh can, Peter Guest. And don't come back! Next time you sneak in here, I'll shoot first and show yore confession afterwards. Now, get goin', feller!"

And Peter Guest lost no time in getting out. Hashknife, after putting on his boots, locked the door from the outside and went back to the saloon. It seemed incredible that he should have a confession of that kind from the most prominent man in the town, but to those familiar with Peter Guest's signature, there would be no disproving the statement.

Hashknife knew now that the money he had belonged to Peter Guest, and that Peter suspected him of having it. And he realized that it was dangerous for him to have that money on his person. He went to the saloon and found Sleepy in the poker game, winning a little.

Hashknife sat down at a table and busied himself with some newspapers until Sleepy drew out of the game. It was getting late so they crossed to the hotel and went up to their room. They found that someone had emptied their war-sacks on the floor, torn the bed all apart and had apparently searched everything in the room.

Sleepy sat down on the bed and stared around the room and Hashknife leaned against the wall and surveyed the disorder. He pondered on the mental capacity of a man like Peter Guest, who would be fool enough to make a second attempt even after writing that incriminating statement.

"Well, what in hell has been goin' on here?" wondered Sleepy.

"Looks as though somebody had searched our place kinda thoroughly, Sleepy."

"My gosh, I'll say they have. But what for, do yuh suppose?"

"That's hard to say," Hashknife grinned widely at Sleepy. "Somebody must 'a' thought we owned something, pardner."

"Uh-huh. Say, I wonder if it's anythin' about that holdup? You know what Haverty said about old Peter Guest tryin' to have us arrested. Mebbe they was lookin' for evidence."

"And found some dirty clothes."

"I wish I'd been here. Golly, I'd like to have somebody try to burgle my room. Now we've got to make that bed all over again. I hope they're satisfied."

"They ain't," declared Hashknife ungrammatically. "Nothin' but a pack-rat would ever be satisfied with what we've got."

No one molested them again that night. The next morning Hashknife was disinclined to get up early, so Sleepy dressed and went down alone. As soon as he was gone Hashknife counted the money, and found it totaled fourteen thousand and eighty dollars. It was all in fifty-dollar and one hundred-dollar bills, except for the eighty dollars, which was in twenties. The money was practically new, which accounted for the smallness of the bundles.

Hashknife was going to get it into a safe place as soon as possible. He stuffed a bundle in each hip-pocket and went down to breakfast. He found the sheriff eating with Sleepy and sat down with them.

"I'm goin' out to see Bull Hampton," said the sheriff. "Yuh remember I left word for him to come and see me, but he don't seem to be doin' it very fast."

Hashknife thought perhaps it was an invitation to ride out to the AH ranch, but he did not accept.

A husky, red-cheeked woman took their orders; the sheriff told them that she was Cheerful's wife.

"He's scared to eat here. She bounced a soup-bowl off his eye. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Poor Cheerful! Biggest liar in the State and one of the best-hearted fellers yuh ever met. Why, he even lies to me. But he's a good man, just the same."

"She's got all his money," grinned Sleepy. "He told me she had a roll of his that would choke a horse."

"Aw, he's a liar. I'd like to get 'em back together again. Cheerful means all right, but he gets confused. Well, I've got to be movin' along, gents."

A little later in the morning Hashknife met Peter Guest on the street, but the little banker did not speak. He was on his way to the bank. Hashknife sauntered round until the bank opened, and went in. Freeman was the only person in sight, and greeted Hashknife pleasantly.

Hashknife leaned on the cashier's cage and rolled a cigaret.

"Peter Guest told yuh we came here to buy land, didn't he?" asked Hashknife.

"No, he didn't mention it," said Freeman.

"Prob'ly never thought of it. We're lookin' around at some of Guest's property, and I just got to thinkin', after what happened the other day, that it wasn't safe to pack a lot of money around. I'd like to deposit what I've got into a checkin' account for a few days."

"Sure," nodded Freeman. But his eyes opened perceptibly as Hashknife drew out the two bundles of currency and laid them on the ledge.

"I think there's fourteen thousand dollars," he said.

Freeman swallowed thickly. Fourteen thousand dollars! The approximate size of the Ironclad payroll. His fingers shook as he counted it carefully and made out the deposit-slip. He had difficulty in fixing up the bank-book. Hashknife leaned negligently against the cage, smoking easily, as if depositing fourteen thousand was an every-day occurrence with him.

Freeman shoved the bank-book over to him and picked up the money.

"Thank yuh," said Hashknife. "I feel better now."

Freeman watched him leave the bank, and then picked up the money and fairly ran back to Peter Guest's private office, where the little old banker was enjoying a cigar. He threw the money down on the desk.

"Hartley—" he exclaimed—"he—he just deposited fourteen thousand dollars!"

Peter Guest's face twisted and grew purple. He picked up the money and looked at it.

"It—it wasn't marked, was it?" asked Freeman.

"No, you fool!" roared Peter Guest. "My God! Stole my money and deposited it in my bank!"

"But it might be his money," said Freeman weakly. "He said he came over here to buy land."

Peter Guest nodded weakly.

"He told me day before yesterday, Freeman. It—it might be his money—but I'll be damned if I believe it! That man is too smart. He—he's a— Freeman, take that money and lock it up! What's it to you? You act as though it was your money. Get the damn stuff away from me!"

Hashknife leaned against the front of the hotel and laughed. At last he had the money in a safe place. It would take a long time for them to prove that it wasn't his money.

When Dad Hampton told Bull about the sheriff's reasons for visiting the AH that morning, Bull had nothing to say. He could not prove where he had been that afternoon. He had seen no one. It was true he had not been over two miles from the scene of the holdup, as the old cabin on Hangman Creek was not far off the Ironclad road.

"They're tryin' to railroad me again," declared Bull. "If they get me this time I won't stand a ghost of a chance."

"Won't you go in and talk with the sheriff?" asked Dad.

"Yeah, I'll do that; but not until I'm set for a getaway, in case they try to grab me. I'm goin' to plant an outfit at the old cabin, where I can pick it up if I have to."

Dad knew there was no chance to dissuade Bull. They did not tell Ma Hampton. Bull took what stuff he could pack on the saddle with him and went to the old cabin, where he hid it under the old puncheon floor, along with the rifle and ammunition.

THE NEXT morning, after an early breakfast, he took more stuff and headed for the old cabin, but this time the sheriff and deputy saw him. They were too far away to see that he had anything with him, but not too far to recognize him. They watched him disappear along the brush of the creek bottom.

"You go back to town, Cheerful," said the sheriff. "Kinda keep an eye on Hartley and Stevens, while I trail Bull. He may just be goin' for a ride, but I want to be sure."

They separated. The sheriff left the road and cut across the slopes behind the AH, heading northeast. After about a mile he crossed the creek and rode to higher ground. Up there the cañon widened, and the sheriff felt that he could get a much better view from the rim. Bull was at least fifteen minutes ahead of him, so the sheriff rode as fast as possible, keeping away from the rim. He was much higher than the opposite side, and thus would have a good opportunity to see Bull if he left the creek.

At intervals he swung back to the edge of the cañon and surveyed the country below him, but could not see any one. He went along until he was about four miles from the AH ranch, before seeing anything of his quarry, and had just about decided that Bull had doubled back on him when he saw the old cabin in a little clearing, far below him.

It was almost a bird's-eye view. In front of the cabin stood the horse Bull had ridden from the ranch, but Bull was not in sight. The sheriff squatted under the edge of a juniper and lighted a cigaret. At that distance there was no danger of any one's seeing the tiny bit of smoke.

He glanced back at his horse, which was tied a few feet behind him, and noticed that the animal's ears were tilted forward, its eyes gazing across at the opposite side of the cañon. Following its gaze, he saw two horses near the other rim, and after a moment he was able to discern the two men, humped at the edge of the cañon, evidently watching the cabin.

The horses were standing in the sunlight, and the sheriff was able to distinguish the colors.

"Black and a sorrel," he muttered. "That would be Friday Jones and mebbe Harry McCall. They're interested in Bull Hampton, too."

He glanced back at the cabin. Bull came out, took something from his saddle and went in again.

Splinter Woods swore softly. In his office was a perfectly good pair of field-glasses, and if he ever needed them he did right now. Bull came out again, closed the cabin door, mounted his horse and rode back the way he came.

The sheriff watched Bull following the old trail down the creek bottom until he was lost from view. Friday and Harry evidently did the same, because they waited until Bull was out of sight before they mounted and came angling their way down the side of the cañon.

The sheriff stayed where he was and watched Friday and Harry ride up to the old cabin and dismount. They went inside, but came out in a few moments and stood beside their horses, evidently talking it over. Friday started to enter the cabin again, halted at the doorway and came back. Then he shut the door, mounted his horse, and they rode back over the rim of the cañon again.

And from there they headed toward Rainville, traveling slowly. Splinter got to his feet, untied his horse, and went

farther up the cañon, where he found an old cattle-trail, which gave him an easy descent into the creek-bottom.

He rode down to the cabin, dismounted and went in. It was an old, abandoned place, one room, with a built-in bunk. There was no sign of occupancy. Splinter stood in the doorway, trying to puzzle out why Bull Hampton had come here. As he went to the center of the room, the old floor rattled beneath his feet. It was then that he saw a piece of puncheon which had not been properly replaced.

Quickly he moved it aside, disclosing Bull's cache. There was a repeating rifle, several boxes of cartridges, some canned goods, crackers, matches, salt. A flat canvas roll held a pair of blankets, a pair of socks, gloves.

The sheriff examined everything, and replaced the flooring. He knew it was Bull's getaway outfit. The proper thing for him to do would have been to confiscate it; but Splinter Woods was too shrewd to do that. He knew that if Bull found it missing, he would streak out of the country as fast as he could. And Splinter Woods wanted to catch the man who had killed Paul Vetter.

He left everything as he had found it, mounted and rode over the rim toward Rainville. He reasoned that Friday and Harry had spotted Bull from the west rim of the cañon, and had been curious enough to ride down and see what Bull was doing there. He was not sure they had found the cache.

CHEERFUL rode back from the AH ranch, and found Hashknife and Sleepy in town. Having seen Peter Guest make a trip to the depot, Hashknife hazarded a guess that Peter had sent a telegram to Bill Westfield, at Teton City, to try to get a line on him and Sleepy.

Cheerful joined them at the Peacock saloon, where Hashknife and Sleepy were playing pool.

"Didje find Bull Hampton?" asked Hashknife.

Cheerful shook his head.

"I didn't go all the way out there, Hartley. Splinter ain't back yet."

He watched them play several games of pool, after which they loafed around until it was time to eat. Cheerful did not go to the hotel with them, but ate at a Chinese restaurant.

It was shortly after the noon hour when Friday Jones and Harry McCall rode in, and came to the Peacock bar. Friday drew Cheerful aside and talked at length with him, after which Friday and Harry rode away. Cheerful came back to Hashknife and Sleepy, and Hashknife thoughtfully bought a drink. One drink was all that Cheerful needed to start him going. His credit was good at the Peacock.

After six hookers of rum he became confidential.

"Splinter won't find Bull at the AH," he declared.

"What's the difference?" asked Hashknife. "You'll never be able to put the deadwood on Bull Hampton."

"Don't be too damn sure. I just had a talk with Friday Jones. Him and Harry McCall saw Bull at an old cabin on Hangman creek a while ago, and they found Bull's getaway outfit cached under the floor. If he ain't done somethin', what's the outfit for, eh? Winchester rifle, shells, grub, blankets. Huh? Don't tell me!"

"Where's the old cabin?" asked Hashknife.

"Right straight east of here, over on the creek. There's three big pines together on this rim of the cañon. Hell, I could find it in my sleep. Whatcha drinkin'?"

"That don't prove anythin'," said Hashknife.

"Proves enough. You takin' see-gars? Gimme liquor. I've got the insides of a man. Live straight, drink straight, shoot straight—that's my motto. Fill 'm up agin', Mike."

Six more, and Cheerful sat down and cried over the hard luck he had had all his life. It was then that Hashknife drew Sleepy from the saloon, and they went to the livery-stable and they saddled their horses. And as they rode out the north end of the town, Splinter rode in at the south end. Finding Cheerful asleep at the

Peacock, he asked the bartender whether Friday Jones and Harry McCall had been there.

"They was here for a few minutes, Splinter. They talked with Cheerful and went away."

"Uh-huh."

Splinter looked at the sleeping deputy.

"See anythin' of Hartley and Stevens?"

"They left here just a few minutes ago," said the bartender. "I dunno where they went."

Splinter left the saloon and went to the hotel, but there was no sign of Hashknife and Sleepy. As he came from the hotel he met the depot agent, who was carrying a telegram to Peter Guest. Splinter went to the bank with him, and saw Peter Guest read the telegram.

"Have you seen anythin' of Hartley and Stevens, Peter?" asked Splinter.

The old banker's face twisted disgustedly.

"No and I hope I never see them again. This morning the tall one deposited fourteen thousand in currency in this bank."

"He what?"

"That's what I said—fourteen thousand dollars. He said he was representing another man in buying some land over here; so I wired that man. Here's the answer."

He handed Splinter the telegram. It was from William Westfield, at Teton City, and read:

HARTLEY AND STEVENS REPRESENTING ME THEY ARE O.K.

"William Westfield, eh?" queried Splinter. "The sheep-man?"

"Yes!" snapped Peter Guest testily. "What of it?"

"Oh, nothin, I reckon. Only I'd hate to see sheep in here."

"All right, get the cattlemen to buy those ranches."

"You know we can't do that."

"Then don't interfere with my business, Woods."

The sheriff did not reply, but turned and walked out. In his own office he sat down to ponder over what he had found at the old cabin. He was deep in thought when Bull Hampton rode to the front of the office, dismounted and came in.

As far as the sheriff could determine he was unarmed. He stopped just inside the doorway and they looked at each other curiously.

"Dad said yuh wanted to see me," said Bull.

"Set down," Splinter indicated a chair. Bull sat down, his hands on his knees.

"Was it about the trouble the other day —with you and Peterson and McCall?" asked Bull.

"I've forgot that deal," said Splinter slowly. "All I wanted to know was where you was the day of the holdup."

"That day?" Bull looked at the ceiling thoughtfully.

"Yeah, that day, Bull."

"I was ridin' in the hills, Splinter."

"Uh-huh. Alone?"

"Sure."

"You wasn't up toward the Ironclad road, was yuh?"

"Up that way, Splinter."

"Uh-huh. Well, I just wanted to know. That's all, Bull."

"All right, Splinter, thanks."

Bull walked out, mounted his horse and rode out of town. Splinter scratched his head foolishly.

"I wanted to ask him about that cache," he told himself. "But I just couldn't do it. Feelin' sorry for folks is a hell of a frame of mind for a sheriff to git into."

He picked up his hat and went straight to the livery-stable, where he asked the stableman whether Hartley and Stevens had gone out.

"Yeah, they went away quite a while ago, Sheriff. How long? Say, I believe it was about the time you came in. I 'member seein' you ride in about that time. Nope, I dunno where they went—didn't notice which way they headed."

Splinter went back to the Peacock, where Cheerful was snoring heavily, his chin sunk on his chest. Splinter drew the bartender aside.

"Mike, did Friday Jones say anythin' to Cheerful?"

"Yuh mean a while ago? I reckon so. Anyway, I heard Cheerful arguin' with that tall cowpuncher about an old cabin over in Hangman Cañon. They was talkin' about Bull Hampton, too, I think."

"Uh-huh. Thank yuh, Mike. You don't happen to know any real old shepherd that's lost his mind, hearin' and sight, do yuh?"

"No, I don't, Splinter," seriously. "Why?"

"I'm thinkin' of firin' Cheerful, and I need a better man to take his job."

IN THE meantime Hashknife and Sleepy were heading for the old cabin on Hangman Creek. They had no idea where it was, except that it was due east of Rainville and that three big pines together on the rim of the cañon marked the spot.

Sleepy did not ask Hashknife why they were going to this old cabin. He did ask Hashknife what business it was of his that Bull Hampton had a getaway cache, but Hashknife did not answer.

They had little difficulty in finding the creek, and half-mile farther to the north they found the three trees. They rode down to the cabin and went inside. There was nothing to show just where the cache was located; between the wall and the bunk Hashknife began removing the puncheon flooring.

He had taken up only three pieces, when he dropped to his knees, with a grunt of satisfaction. But it was not the cache of Bull Hampton—it was the money-box of the Ironclad stage.

Hashknife picked it up and took it to the doorway. It was a cheap, japanned tin box, locked with a small padlock. Hashknife found an old horseshoe, one end of which he inserted through the padlock, twisting it open.

Inside was a duplicate of the two packages of money he had found near the wrecked stage. He broke the wrapper on one package and examined the money closely; Sleepy stared wide-eyed at it.

"My ——!" whispered Sleepy. "That's the loot!"

"It was," laughed Hashknife harshly.

He walked over to the creek and threw the box into a deep-pool, where it floated long enough to fill with water, and sank out of sight.

"What's the idea?" queried Sleepy. "Yo're goin' to take that money back, ain't yuh?"

"Some time, pardner."

He stuffed it inside his shirt and they went back to the horses, without looking further.

"Ain't yuh goin' to look at Bull's cache —the gun and the blankets?" asked Sleepy.

"Not interested," said Hashknife.

Sleepy grunted in annoyance, and as they rode away, Hashknife smiled softly. He was thinking of a man and a woman who had driven into the valley with a team of oxen fifty years ago; whose farm was for sale to a sheep-man. Sleepy said seriously—

"If they catch yuh with that money we'll both go to jail, Hashknife."

"If they do, Sleepy. But I feel particularly lucky right now."

"Uh-huh. Goin' to tell the sheriff what yuh found?"

"Not yet; this is a secret."

"Yea-a-a-ah! By golly, I'm glad to be in on some of yore secrets, even if it does make me kinda jumpy."

It was nearing sundown as they rode back across the hills into the setting sun. Hashknife was singing softly, and Sleepy looked curiously at him. It was not often that Hashknife sang, and it was usually when some rather difficult problem had been solved in his own mind. He was not a singer. His voice was low-pitched, as he sang to the stride of the tall gray horse:

"Where they welcome yuh in
To the best they have got;
And don't care a damn
If yo're busted or not.
They don't have no mansions,
They'll laugh at yore jokes,
But they never laugh at yuh,
These cow-country folks."

"Sounds like a funeral dirge to me," said Sleepy.

"It might be, at that, Sleepy."

"Well, if yuh ask me what to do, I'll tell yuh to give that money to the sheriff right away, and as soon as we get our supper we'll pull out of this country."

"How about buyin' them ranches, Sleepy?"

"Oh, yeah."

Sleepy sighed deeply.

"I was just wonderin' about them old folks, Hashknife."

"So was I, pardner; they're pretty old. Must be past seventy. That's shore a hard age to get out and rustle a new home."

"And they're right nice old folks, Hashknife."

"Ain't they? Reg'lar old pa and ma folks."

"And old Peter Guest could let 'em live there as long as they live. It wouldn't cost him a cent. But I reckon he'd just bust wide open if anybody suggested such a thing."

"I've been wonderin' about it."

Sleepy laughed shortly.

"You'd shore have to—say, you ain't serious, Hashknife? I was just kiddin'."

"Don't the Bible say somethin' about ask and thou shalt receive, Sleepy?"

"Yeah, but it didn't mean Peter Guest."

"Mebbe they didn't have him in mind," laughed Hashknife.

BAD NEWS travels swiftly, and Peter Guest did not know he was stirring up a hornet's nest when he let Splinter Woods read that telegram from William Westfield. Splinter told Dan McKinley, and on his way back to the Circle Star, Dan met Tonto Potts and told him.

And that evening Wash Reid, Tonto Potts, Norm Leslie and Jawbone Irving came in from the Tumbling R; and from the Circle Star came Dan McKinley, Booze Haverty and Chuck Neeley. Friday Jones, Harry McCall and Andy Peterson came in from the Double Diamond. They had little to say, being in the employ of Peter Guest, but they would stay with the majority.

In a body they went down to Peter Guest's house and called the old banker outside. Wash Reid acted as spokesman.

"You got a telegram from Bill Westfield today," stated Reid. "We all know who Westfield is; he's the biggest sheep-man in the Teton Wells country. Now we understand that yo're figurin' on sellin' him the AH and the Circle Star ranches, and these two punchers, Hartley and Stevens, are actin' as agents for Westfield. How near right is that, Guest?"

"That is my business," said Guest coldly.

"By God, it's our business, too!" snapped Dan McKinley.

"Are you trying to scare me?" demanded Guest hotly.

"We don't care whether yuh scare or not," replied Wash Reid. "Yo're not goin' to sell out to a shepherd."

"Buy me out then. I'll sell to any one—any one who has the price, Reid. You can't scare me. I've made no prices and have considered none. Westfield sent these men to make a deal with me, and that's all there is to it."

"Has any one else offered to buy them?"

"Not a soul. If I wait for a cow-man to buy them, I'll never sell. My money is invested in those places, and I've got a right to sell. The law will protect me in that."

"I reckon he's right, boys," sighed Reid. "We'll abide by the law as long as we can."

He led his men back to the street and down to the hotel. Hashknife and Sleepy were eating supper when the crowd came in. There was something ominous about these men who came clanking in. It was rather unusual for cowboys to come into the dining-room wearing chaps and spurs. Cheerful Miller's wife was just coming in with a tray of dishes, but she dropped them with a terrific crash when she looked toward the table, where Hashknife was half out of his chair, looking down the muzzle of Wash Reid's revolver, while Sleepy was turning around in his chair, his hands lifted. Haverty and Tonto Potts were covering him.

"What's the idea of the surprize party?" asked Hashknife.

"Just our little idea," said Reid. "Get their guns, boys."

In a moment the guns were removed, and Hashknife and Sleepy lowered their hands. Reid turned to Dan McKinley.

"Send some of the boys to the stable and saddle their horses, Dan."

Jawbone Irving and Andy Peterson left the room.

"We understand that you two are agents for Bill Westfield," said Reid.

Hashknife nodded quickly.

"Yeah—what of it?"

"What of it? Think yo're goin' to make a sheep range out of this country, eh? Well, yuh won't! Have yuh paid Peter Guest anythin' yet?"

"Not a cent."

"Good! You two are goin' to fork yore broncs and head out of this country, *sabe?* And you can tell Bill Westfield that he'll never run sheep in Blue Joint Valley. You can head out over the divide at the Ironclad mine and get back to yore woolies. And don't come back, Hartley. Never come back. We don't want yore kind here!"

"Well, all right," said Hashknife meekly. "Yuh see, we didn't know how yuh felt about it, gents."

"Sings pretty small, don't he?" laughed Friday Jones.

"Shepherds mostly always do," chuckled Neeley. "They had a lot of nerve comin' over here dressed like punchers. We ought to make 'em walk home."

"That's the stuff!" blurted Harry McCall. "Let's do that."

Wash Reid shook his head quickly.

"No, boys. I reckon they know better than to come back."

Hashknife relaxed and stole a glance at Sleepy, who was so mad that his lips were white. His eyes snapped as he shot a glance at Hashknife. He wanted to jump out of his chair and start fighting.

"Scared stiff," declared Friday Jones, who mistook the expression on Sleepy's face. Peterson came striding in.

"Horses in front," he said.

Reid turned to Hashknife and Sleepy.

"Yore bags packed?"

Hashknife nodded. The proprietor of the hotel was in the hallway, watching and listening. He offered to bring down the baggage. Hashknife and Sleepy went outside and tied their war-bags on the saddles. After they were mounted Reid handed them back their guns—empty.

"You know the way out," he said coldly. "Just keep goin' and don't never come back."

"Yes, sir," said Hashknife meekly. "Sorry to have annoyed yuh. So-long."

They rode slowly out of town, with Sleepy in the lead, and Hashknife could see him stuffing shells into his gun. He drew rein at the end of the street.

"I'm goin' back," he declared flatly. "I'm goin' to make Friday Jones eat lead, Hashknife."

Hashknife chuckled softly.

"Nothin' of the kind, Sleepy. We're run out of town, don't yuh understand? This is the first time it ever happened to us, cowboy. Don't go back. It means trouble if yuh do."

"He said I was scared," gritted Sleepy. "I'll show him who's scared!"

"Aw, I'm just as mad as you are, Sleepy. C'mon, pardner the odds are too great."

"You mean to leave here, Hashknife? Goin' to let 'em run yuh away?"

"No, sir. C'mon."

Peter Guest had followed them up from his house and had observed the humiliation of Hashknife and Sleepy. He had hoped to sell those two ranches to Westfield, but this was worth almost as much to him. He would have been willing to get rid of Hashknife and Sleepy at almost any price. He would have been more satisfied if he could have recovered his written statement, which was in Hashknife's note-book; but he felt that if it came to a showdown he could swear it was acquired through force, and that he had merely been trying to find out whether they were the ones who had robbed him. And as far as the fourteen thousand deposit was concerned, he felt sure the money belonged to Westfield.

After it was over, William Freeman, who had heard about what happened in

the hotel, met Peter Guest near the bank.

"I was afraid they'd feel that way about the sheep," said Freeman. "Perhaps it is best this way."

"Won't stop me from selling, if I get an offer," said the old banker. "These cowpunchers can't bluff me. I'll own all this valley before I get through. And Wash Reid is going to be sorry for the way he talked to me tonight."

"Got nasty, eh?"

"Too nasty to suit me. I've let him pass a few interest dates, but no more. He'll pay on the dot. When I get that Tumbling R, I can defy anybody to stop me from doing what I wish. By God, I may run sheep myself!"

"There's money in it," said Freeman.

"It's worth thinking about."

He turned on his heel and walked away without another word. It was like Peter Guest. Freeman went across to the Peacock, where the men were drinking to their success in ending the sheep threat.

Wash Reid got his men away from the Peacock as soon as he could, but Tonto Potts and Jawbone Irving were carrying just a little too much liquor when they mounted their horses. Tonto always rode the worst horse he could find on the Tumbling R, and this night was no exception.

Jawbone Irving was almost as wild as Tonto, and the two of them galloped out of Rainville yelling at the top of their voices, while Wash Reid and Norm Leslie took the usual traveling gait of cattlemen.

They finally overtook Tonto and Jawbone, for Tonto had been thrown, and was having difficulty in mounting again. Wash took great pains in telling Tonto what a fool he was, but his words fell on deaf ears; they helped Tonto remount, and he took out his fury on the half-crazed horse, which ran away with him, closely followed by Jawbone.

"Crazy drunk," sighed Reid. "Some day a bad horse will kill Tonto Potts, Norm."

"Wonder one hasn't before this, Wash. When he's sober he's all right; but a drink makes a devil out of him. He's got jist enough Injun blood in him to be wild."

They rode in at the ranch and drew up at the open stable door. A loose horse stood between them and the ranch-house, and they heard a peculiar noise. It was too dark to distinguish objects clearly, but they soon discovered that it was Jawbone Irving, leaning against the stable door and crying brokenly.

"What in hell is the matter with you?" demanded Wash.

"It's Tonto," sobbed the half-drunk Jawbone. "His horse killed him."

Wash Reid stepped back.

"What are you talkin' about, Jawbone? Yo're drunk!"

"I ain't drunk. That bronc kicked all the life out of Tonto. Go in and look, if yuh don't believe me."

Wash Reid stepped inside the stable and with trembling fingers lighted the stable lantern. There was the black broncho that Tonto Potts had ridden, its shoulders cruelly cut from the spurs, its body caked with lather.

"Wait'll I take that black devil away," said Norm.

He stepped in and grasped the reins of the bridle, turning the animal into a stall. Wash Reid lifted the lantern and stepped past the horse. Tonto Potts was stretched out in the corner, face down, one arm twisted under him. Jawbone came in slowly, his face white.

"I—I heard it," he whispered. "The bronc screamed, and then it sounded like when yuh hit somethin'—kinda mushy. My God! I—I tried to talk to him, but he wouldn't answer."

Having tied the horse, Norm helped them pick Tonto off the floor. He was as limp as a rag. They carried him up to the house. Millicent was awake, and Aunt Jennie, a little wisp of an old lady, sharp-featured, grim-mouthed, came down in a few moments to listen to Wash Reid explain what had happened.

"I've expected it a long time," she declared. "It's a wonder more of you boys ain't been killed."

"Sh-h-h-h," warned Millicent. "This

is no time to point out their failings, Aunt Jennie. Get me some hot water."

They stretched Tonto Potts out on the sofa. He was breathing jerkily. There was blood on his hair and his right arm fell into an awkward position. Millicent got some towels and, when Aunt Jennie came with the water, she washed the dust and blood off Tonto's face and head.

"I reckon we better get the doctor," said Jawbone.

They stared down at Tonto, making no reply. It seemed as if they all knew it would be useless to go for medical assistance.

Millicent was sponging off his face again, when his eyes opened. He shifted his eyes sidewise, trying to look at them. Apparently he could not move his head. His eyes were bright, however.

"How do yuh feel Tonto?" whispered Millicent.

He looked at her closely and a smile creased his lips.

"I don't feel—much," he whispered.

"Don't know where yo're hurt?" asked Wash Reid.

For several moments the skinny cowboy seemed to gasp for breath, and his face turned whiter. Millicent lifted a cup and poured some water between his teeth. He thanked her with a blink of his eyes.

"Good to me," he whispered. "Awful good, Milly. Gotta tell you somethin', Milly. I—I—the letter you wrote to Bull—I sold to Freeman. I got Bull's letters at postoffice—and Freeman paid me—that's the truth, Milly. I'm—"

"Prop his head up a little!" exclaimed Wash Reid.

"No use," said Norm slowly. "Tonto won't ride again."

Millicent got slowly to her feet.

"He stole those letters," she whispered to her father. "Freeman paid him. Oh why did he do that?"

Wash Reid shook his head sadly. In spite of all Tonto's faults, he had liked the skinny little puncher. And he had confessed at the last moment. Millicent turned to Norm.

"Will you saddle my horse, Norm?"

"Why, sure, Milly. I—uh—"

"Saddle your horse?" exclaimed Aunt Jennie. "At this time of night? You must be crazy."

"That's what I wanted to say," said Wash Reid slowly, "but you beat me to it, Jennie. Go saddle the horse, Norm."

"But, Wash!" exclaimed the little old lady.

"You better go to bed, Jennie."

"She's going over to see Bull Hampton!"

"I'm not deaf—nor dumb. And I'm goin' with her."

"You're as big a fool as she is."

"Bigger. Norm, you can saddle yore own horse and go to town. Tell Splinter Woods what happened if yuh see him and send the doctor out to attend to the body. Jawbone you go to bed here in the house, or Aunt Jennie will be tellin' everybody that I left her alone with a corpse to take my girl to visit a jailbird."

"I think you are a very unnatural brother!" snapped Aunt Jennie. "If I knew you felt that way about me I'd never have made my home with you!"

"Well," drawled Wash Reid, "it took yuh over twenty years to find out all about me—and it took a killin' to bring out my true character."

"Well, if she was my daughter she'd never go, I can tell you that!"

"Lot of satisfaction, sister," laughed Wash Reid.

They had quarreled that way for years; so no one paid the least attention to them. Aunt Jennie had taken the place of a mother in the raising of Millicent, and she felt that she had a perfect right in dictating—even if no one obeyed her.

Jawbone sneaked away to bed. He was badly upset over the death of Tonto Potts, and had no desire to hear Aunt Jennie's arguments, which were sure to be directed at him after the rest of them were gone. As Wash Reid had often said—

"Aunt Jennie would stand for an hour arguin' with a wooden Injun over the effects of tobacco in the human system, and go away satisfied that she had won her point."

Ordinarily Wash Reid would have tried to persuade Milly to wait until morning, but when Aunt Jennie interfered, he would have ridden all the way to Phoenix to show her she wasn't boss.

WHEN Bull Hampton left the sheriff's office that afternoon he was just a little puzzled over the sheriff's questions. It seemed to Bull that the sheriff knew he had been near the scene of the holdup. He wondered whether there were any chance that the sheriff had found his cache at the old cabin. The more Bull thought about it the more he decided he had been a fool to leave his stuff in the cabin. The hunch became so strong that he turned his horse off the road and headed for the cabin.

Bull rode fast, because he wanted to be home at supper time, and the sun was getting pretty close to the Blue Joint range.

And then he saw Hashknife and Sleepy come up over the rim of the cañon near the three tall pines. Bull was near enough to recognize them by their horses, but they did not see him. Waiting until they were out of sight, he rode down to the cabin.

It happened that Hashknife had not replaced the flooring, and Bull saw this at a glance. He lifted the flooring over his cache and noticed that his stuff had been disturbed.

"Now, what are them jiggers up to?" he wondered. He looked at the place where Hashknife had found the money-box, but there was nothing to indicate that they had found anything there.

He dug up all his stuff and took it outside. Back of the cabin and along the creek was a pile of big boulders grown over with brush. He carried his stuff up there and concealed it carefully, wrapping it all inside the tarpaulin. It was a much better hiding-place, because of the fact that cabins are usually the first places to be searched.

He went back to his horse and climbed into the saddle. There was yet time for him to reach the ranch before supper time if he hurried. He galloped his horse about a hundred yards below the cabin, swung down through a gravel wash to cross the creek, when the horse stumbled and went to its knees, throwing Bull almost into the water.

As the horse went down, Bull flung himself sidewise, jerking his left foot from the stirrup, and as he plunged across the boulders at the edge of the stream he felt a sharp pain through his ankle.

The horse floundered to its feet and crossed the creek. The reins were still across its neck, so it kept on going. Bull's hands were badly bruised from the fall, but he was more concerned about the aching ankle.

He sat up at the edge of the stream and removed the boot. At first he was afraid he had broken some bones, but after an investigation he decided it was a sprain. The ankle was swelling rapidly; he took off his sock and put the foot in the creek.

The cool water eased the pain to a certain extent, but Bull was wise enough to know that it would be impossible for him to walk home, or even to catch the horse. He was unable to bear any weight on the ankle.

"Well, I shore hobbled myself that time," he decided. "I'm hung up here high-and-dry until somebody finds me."

He managed to put the sock on again, but it was out of the question to replace the boot. There was nothing handy to use as a crutch, so he fastened the boot to the back of his belt and began crawling toward his cache behind the cabin.

It was not over two hundred yards back to the cache in the boulders, but the longest two hundred yards Bull ever saw. It was torture to drag the leg, but he gritted his teeth and kept going until he got there. He dragged out his stuff and managed to get it down to the water, where he spread out the blankets and found a convenient place to soak the ankle again.

There was plenty of drift-wood, piled up by the spring freshet, and he had enough food to last him a few days; hence he was not badly situated. And he knew Dad would come searching for him the

next morning. He realized that they would be worried at the ranch, and wondered whether Dad would try to find him at night. At any rate, he decided to keep a fire burning all night, in case any one did search for him, because they would never find him otherwise. The horse would probably go straight home, and that would assure them that he had met with an accident.

IT WAS near midnight when Millicent and her father rode into the AH ranch-house. There was a light in the living-room, which was an unusual thing in the range country, as range people are accustomed to retiring early.

"Must be somebody sick," said Wash Reid as they dismounted. "I think you were crazy to insist on ridin' over here tonight, Milly. I didn't want to say that in front of Aunt Jennie, yuh know; and yuh can thank her for me ridin' with yuh."

"I can't help it," said Millicent. "I thought Bull lied to me, and I know he thought the same of me. I just couldn't wait to tell him we were both wrong."

"Yeah, and I'm goin' to pin Bill Freeman's ears back and run him out of this country," declared Wash Reid.

They went up the steps to the front door and knocked softly. Ma Hampton opened the door cautiously. She had on an old wrapper, slippers and a cap. Behind her stood Dad Hampton, bootless, his glasses on the end of his nose. The visitors stepped inside.

"Why, bless my soul!" gasped the old lady. "Milly Reid!"

Millicent laughed and hugged the old lady, Wash Reid and Dad Hampton looked foolishly at each other.

"Ridin' kinda late, ain't yuh, Wash?" asked Dad.

"And yo're settin' up kinda late, ain't yuh, Dad?"

"That's right, Wash. I've been tryin' to get Ma to go to bed, but she won't do it."

"Milly, I'm sure glad to see you again," said Ma huskily. "It's been ages since I've seen you, but you ain't changed a bit. Oh, I'm glad you came!"

"So am I, Ma. Where is Bull?"

Ma shook her head helplessly.

"That's why we're waitin' up, Milly. He didn't come home for supper."

"Not here, eh?" queried Wash Reid.

Dad shook his head.

"You folks set down and take off yore things, while Ma puts the coffee-pot on. We're expectin' Bull any minute."

"Tonto Potts was killed tonight," said Wash Reid.

"Tonto Potts? Killed, yuh say, Wash? How in the world did that happen?"

"Bad horse—kicked to death."

"Oh, wasn't that terrible!"

"And that's why we came, Ma," said Millicent. "He told us something before he died—told us that Bill Freeman paid him to steal my letter to Bull, and to steal the two letters from Bull to me. That was why we never heard from each other."

"Well, my Lord! Bill Freeman done that, Milly?"

"Yes, and Bull thinks I didn't answer his letters."

"I know he does," slowly. "It hurt him, Milly."

"I know. It hurt me, too. I remember that I gave my letter to Tonto to take to the post-office, but I never thought for a moment he sold it to Bill Freeman."

Dad shook his head sadly and put a hand on Millicent's shoulder.

"We've got to go easy with that, Milly," he said. "Bull might kill Freeman for a thing like that. He deserves a just punishment, but—you see, they think Bull had somethin' to do with that robbery and murder of Paul Vetter."

"They don't think that, do they?" asked Millicent.

"I wish they didn't, Milly. And Bull is bitter. He has the idea that every one has turned him down, and that the law is just waitin' for a chance to get him again. The sheriff sent for him to come and see him—but I dunno if he went or not."

"You come out in the kithen with me, Milly," said Ma. "We can talk while I make some coffee."

"Was them two strange cowpunchers out here?" asked Wash.

"Hartley and Stevens?"

"Yea, that's the pair. Know what they intended doin'? They were goin' to buy this ranch for Bill Westfield."

"For the sheep-man?" asked Dad.

"Yeah. Old Peter Guest was goin' to sell 'em this ranch, the Circle Star and probably the Double Diamond. Why, in less than a year this whole valley would be full of sheep."

"Why, I—I didn't know about that," faltered Dad. "I knew they were lookin' at places to buy."

"Well, that's what they were doin'. We found it out, and by golly, we shore sent 'em out of this country in a hurry! And they won't come back either, yuh can bet on that. If old Pete Guest sells this ranch, it won't be to no sheep outfit."

"Well, I'm certainly surprized," said Ma Hampton. "I never seen 'em but that once, but I'd bet they were all right."

"Oh, they're slick," laughed Wash Reid.

"And Bill Westfield wants to make a sheep range of old Blue Joint, eh?" mused Dad.

"He shore did," grinned Wash. "But that's past. At last, it's past for the present. But we'll have to be on our guard."

Dad nodded sadly.

"Yes, I reckon so, Wash. Of course, I ain't got anythin' to say. He owns this ranch, Guest does. I think he owns the old Circle Star now. If he owned yore ranch he could do as he pleases."

"Yeah, and he just about does, Dad. I got hooked with the rest of yuh. I'm still inchin' along, but—oh, well, what's the use of crossin' bridges until yuh reach 'em?"

They sat down and talked until Ma called them to come and have their coffee.

"I wish Bull would come," sighed Dad. "Can't imagine what happened to him. I don't like to worry Ma, but I'm scared he's run into Friday Jones again."

They drank their coffee, every one trying to be as cheerful as possible, but it was difficult for the old folks to hide their apprehension.

"You'll stay the rest of the night, won't yuh?" asked Dad. "We've got plenty of room. No use ridin' back in the dark."

"I ought to go back," said Wash. "Norm went to Rainville to get the doctor to do the undertakin', and I ought to be there when he comes. Milly can stay here if she wants to."

"Sure she wants to," said Ma with a smile. "I know we want her to, and Bull ought to be home real soon. Why, I haven't seen Milly for so long, I don't want to lose her."

"I'll stay until morning," said Milly. "There's nothing I can do at home.

"All right. I'll stable yore horse before I leave."

Wash Reid picked up his hat and, as he turned to the door, there came the dull thudding of running hoofs. Every one looked up quickly.

"That must be Bull," said Dad, starting toward the door.

"More than one horse," said Wash quickly.

Came the rasp of a spurred heel across the porch and a short, impatient knock on the door. Dad flung it open and in stepped Splinter Woods. He was panting heavily and his eyes searched the room. Behind him came Cheerful Miller, Norm Leslie and the three cowboys from the Circle Star.

"Where's Bull?" asked the sheriff.

"Bull?" Dad shook his head. "I dunno, Splinter."

"Ain't home, eh? Hello, Wash. Norm said yuh was here."

"Bull ain't here, Splinter," said Wash. "What's wrong?"

"No idea where he is, eh?"

"What's the matter?" Ma's voice sounded thin in the little room

."Somebody blew the door off the bank vault tonight," said Splinter. "Busted half the windows in town! They cleaned out the place and got plumb away."

"But—but that couldn't have been Bull," said Dad hoarsely.

"How do yuh know?" demanded the sheriff harshly. "Why, you don't even know where he is. How long since he was home?"

"This morning," said Dad truthfully. The sheriff smiled thinly and turned to his men.

"I reckon we're on the right track, boys. C'mon."

They mounted their horses and rode past the house, headed up Hangman Creek. Wash Reid slowly closed the door. Ma Hampton was crying, and Dad was clumsily patting her on the shoulder.

"Oh, that's a shame," choked Millicent. "They don't *know* he did it."

"A-a-a-aw, gosh!" sighed Wash Reid. "I dunno," he said helplessly. "They take too much for granted. Why don't they take out after Hartley and Stevens? I'll betcha them two shepherds came back and cracked that safe. Why didn't I think to say somethin' to Splinter about 'em? I reckon I was too shocked. Oh, dang the luck!"

He strode across the room, his hands clenched, but came back to the door.

"I'll go to town," he said huskily. "Mebbe I can do somethin'—I dunno."

He opened the door and stepped back quickly. Hashknife and Sleepy were standing there, looking at him. Wash Reid's right hand swayed back toward his gun.

"Better not do that!" said Hashknife warningly. "This don't call for gunplay."

They stepped inside and Sleepy closed the door. Wash Reid had moved back, but had taken his hand away from his gun.

"I hope you'll excuse us, folks," said Hashknife. "They ran us out of town, but we wasn't ready to leave just yet, so we took the liberty of sleepin' in yore stable. We was just beddin' down when you folks came—" he nodded toward Wash Reid "—and we was jist outside that window, listenin' to what was said. And then the sheriff and his gang came along and we heard what they said."

"That's a shepherd trick!" rasped Wash Reid. "Listenin' at windows. You'd better get out of here before that gang catches you."

Hashknife smiled softly at Ma Hampton.

"I'm glad you didn't condemn us, too, Mrs. Hampton. Yeah, we heard what you said. Them windows ain't none too sound-proof, yuh know."

"What do yuh hope to gain by buckin' us?" demanded Wash Reid hotly.

"Nothin'," Hashknife smiled at him. "Not a thing. But it's the first time me and Sleepy ever got run out of a town, and it didn't set well."

"You didn't see Bull, did yuh?" asked Dad.

"Not lately. Let's set down, folks. We've got to wait until mornin' before we do anythin'."

"Before we can do anythin'!" parroted Wash Reid. "What do you think *you* can do, Hartley?"

"I dunno yet."

"Take back the money you stole tonight?"

Hashknife's smile faded as he looked at Wash Reid in the light of the oil-lamps. Reid squirmed uneasily under the steady gaze of those level gray eyes, and he wished he had not said that.

"I'm sorry you said that, Daddy," said Millicent. She had never seen this man before, but she seemed to know he was innocent of that charge.

"Thank yuh, Miss," said Hashknife softly. "It wasn't a kind thing to say. But I excuse him, because I don't like sheep any better than he does."

"Yo're buyin' land for 'em," reminded Reid.

"I haven't bought any."

"If you hate sheep so badly—" Reid hesitated.

"I knowed a feller once," said Hashknife softly, "who wouldn't eat pork on a bet, but he worked for three years on a farm where half of his work consisted in packin' swill to the pigs. He didn't love pigs."

"Oh, all right," said Wash Reid. "But just the same you'll be sorry you stayed, Hartley."

"Mebbe. I hope *you* won't, Mr. Reid. I've been sorry lots of times in my life, and

I can stand it; but I hate to see anybody else sorry."

He turned to Millicent.

"You've been sorry. I heard about the man who stole yore letters. I hope that will clear up yore sorrow, Miss Reid."

"I thought it would," said Millicent. "But this had to happen and—" she shook her head and turned away.

"I know," said Hashknife. "It's tough."

"I'll make some more coffee," said Ma Hampton. "Maybe I better fry some eggs."

"Gosh!" grunted Sleepy, grinning widely. "That would be great, Ma Hampton. Yuh see, the indignant committee didn't wait for us to eat our supper and I'm hungry."

Wash Reid grunted. As head of that committee, he was in a position to be indignant.

"I'd like to know what you fellers intend to do," he said.

"If yo're a good boy we may let yuh in on it," grinned Sleepy, who didn't know himself what Hashknife intended doing. "But yuh got to be good, I'll tell yuh that."

Millicent laughed, and even Ma Hampton was amused. It was unusual for any one to talk like that to Wash Reid. He got red in the face, but could not think of a fitting retort.

Millicent and Ma Hampton went into the kitchen, and Hashknife turned to Wash Reid.

"You swaller yore pride," said Hashknife. "Just forget all about that sheep deal until later on, will yuh?"

"Why?"

"You'll know later. What time does the court-house open?"

"Eight o'clock, I think."

"All right. Yo're a solid citizen, Reid. I want you to make a truce with me. I'm playin' a straight game with you."

"Make a truce, Hartley? What do you mean?"

"I want you to back my play in Rainville."

"What kind of a play?"

"To square up a crooked deal, Reid. If I show up in Rainville I'll probably be shot by some of yore crowd. What I want is to have you with me, backin' my play. Man, I've got to have time, and I can't do it with somebody shootin' at me!"

Reid twisted uneasily in his chair, trying to frame a good reason why he shouldn't do any such a thing.

"You do it, Daddy."

Millicent had stood at the doorway, listening. Wash Reid looked at her closely.

"Well," he said slowly, "I'll do it. I may be the biggest fool in Blue Joint, and probably am, but I'll back yore play, Hartley. But I won't guarantee that somebody don't shoot yuh."

"That would be a tough guarantee to back in any town, Reid. I'll take a chance on that part of it."

"Fill me with them eggs and coffee I smell cookin', and yuh can shoot and be darned!" exploded Sleepy.

PETER GUEST stood inside his bank and gazed ruefully at what had formerly been his vault. It was evident that an inexperienced cracksman had done the job, because there was plenty of signs that too much dynamite had been used.

The door sagged open, twisted badly. It was not an up-to-date vault, but quite strong enough to withstand anything less powerful than dynamite. Silver dollars had been blown into the walls and a twenty-dollar gold coin had been bent almost double and wedged in the meshes of the cashier's cage.

It was early in the morning, and a number of people came in to gaze at the latest evidence that crime was increasing in the Blue Joint country. William Freeman arrived and joined Peter Guest. They had spent most of the night in trying to figure out just how much the loss had been.

The explosion had broken windows for quite some distance along the street, and the jar had been sufficient to awaken every one in town. It was possibly thirty minutes after the explosion before any one discovered where it had been. In the

meantime the robbers had made their getaway.

Peter Guest was deaf to all questions, and left them to Freeman. The sheriff and his posse had ridden away shortly after the robbery had been discovered and had not come back. There was much talk about Hashknife and Sleepy, and several men seemed to think they had come back and robbed the bank for revenge.

Friday Jones and his two men came to town, hearing for the first time of the robbery. They went to the bank and viewed the disaster with the rest of the folks.

"Did yuh hear about Tonto Potts gettin' killed last night?" asked Mike, the Peacock bartender.

Friday hadn't. Mike told him what Norm Leslie had told in the Peacock bar just before the explosion. Freeman was interested, because he hadn't heard it the night before.

"I dunno much about it, except what I heard Norm tellin'," said Mike. "He said Tonto only lived long enough to tell a secret to Milly Reid. I dunno what he meant."

Freeman swallowed heavily and walked away, fear in his heart that Tonto Potts had told her about those letters, for which he Freeman, had paid ten dollars apiece. That would be a calamity, he knew—especially when he met Bull Hampton. At any rate it would make him out a cowardly sneak.

Friday and his men walked outside with Mike. Friday took one good, long look down the street and came back inside.

"Hey," he called sharply, "them two shepherds are back again!"

Peter Guest walked quickly to the door, followed by every one in the place. There was the buggy from the AH, with Dad and Ma Hampton, standing in front of the hitchrack at the post-office, and with them were Wash Reid, Millicent and Hashknife and Sleepy. There was no mistaking the gray and sorrel horses. Friday Jones swore softly.

"Where's all our gang?" he wondered aloud. "By God, we'll show them shepherds where to head in at!"

"How much of a gang do you need?" asked Freeman. Friday looked quickly at Freeman and gave a short nod of understanding.

"What's Wash Reid doin' with 'em?" asked McCall.

"That's what we're goin' to find out," said Friday.

"Go easy on it," advised Peterson. "They might be worse than they look, Friday."

"A-a-aw, hell! Sheep-trailers! C'mon."

Wash Reid, Hashknife and Sleepy had left the rack and were going down the street. Friday, Peterson and McCall hurried down to the post-office; they nodded to Dad and Ma Hampton. Millicent had gone inside.

"What's Reid doin' with them two jiggers?" asked Friday.

Dad rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"I dunno; nothin' much."

"Kinda queer actions," said Friday. "We run them two jiggers out of town last night. Where'd they come from?"

"My ranch."

"Yore ranch? Yuh mean from the AH?"

"Yes, Friday."

"They did, eh?"

"They're goin' into the court-house," said McCall.

Friday Jones hesitated.

"We'll wait for 'em," he said. "Let's go git a drink."

The three of them headed across the street to the Peacock.

"By God, this don't look right to me!" snorted Friday.

"Me neither," agreed McCall. "There's somethin snaky about it. What's Wash Reid doin' with 'em?"

No one could answer the question.

Hashknife, Sleepy and Wash Reid went straight to the office of the county treasurer; there a small man with thick glasses spoke pleasantly to Wash Reid.

"I've got a queer request for yuh," smiled Reid. "Would you mind lettin' these two men see that bank-book and the money that was taken off old Jimmy Condon."

The treasurer looked keenly at Hashknife and Sleepy, and smiled slowly at the unusual request.

"Sure, that's all right, Wash. Have you dug up some relatives of old Jimmy?"

"Nope, this is a different matter."

The treasurer took the package from the safe and opened it on the counter. First came the bank-book, showing an entry of five thousand dollars. Hashknife merely glanced at it, but picked up the two twenty-dollar bills and examined them closely. He took out his pocketknife, opened a blade and dug one of the bills lightly. He looked at Wash Reid and smiled broadly.

"That's all I wanted to know," he said. "Thank yuh very much."

Wash Reid glanced at the mystified treasurer, who folded up the package again and took it to the safe.

"That's got me pawin' my hair," admitted Reid.

Hashknife laughed and turned to the door.

"Let's get goin'," he said.

They went back to the street. Friday Jones and his two men were in front of the Peacock, looking toward the court-house.

"Head up, Sleepy," said Hashknife warningly.

Sleepy shot him a quick glance of understanding. He knew that things were beginning to tighten. Sleepy hitched up his belt, swinging his gun a little more forward, and they headed for the post-office, where the Hampton's and Millicent were waiting for them.

Sleepy did not take his eyes off the three men in front of the saloon. Jawbone Irving, riding in, almost fell off his horse when he saw Wash Reid with Hashknife and Sleepy. He cuffed his hat on one side of his head and rode over to the front of the Peacock, where he did all his wondering aloud to Friday and his men. It was almost as much of a shock to Jawbone as had been the death of Tonto Potts.

He saw Ma and Dad Hampton and Millicent Reid join them and all go toward the bank.

"That's what I'd call awe-inspirin'," declared Jawbone.

"It looks—funny to me!" snorted Friday. "Last night Wash Reid wanted to massacree them fellers, and now he's hobnobbin' with 'em. What's the answer?"

"Search me," said Jawbone, sliding off his horse. "Didja hear about Tonto?"

Friday nodded curtly. He was not interested in dead men.

"Well, I'm goin' over and fill m' ears," said Jawbone, and headed across toward the bank.

"Are we goin' over?" asked McCall.

"We're goin' to stay right here for awhile," declared Friday, "I want to know what it's all about."

The sextette that had invaded the bank found Peter Guest behind his railing, looking like a very old and very peevish badger. There were several more people in there, but they moved aside. Peter Guest nodded shortly.

"Cleaned yuh out, eh?" observed Hashknife.

Peter Guest growled something unintelligible. Hashknife grinned at him, and came to the point.

"Guest, you hold mortgages against the AH, Circle Star and the Tumblin' R ranches, don't yuh?"

Peter Guest came forward to the counter, his lips shut tightly as he looked from face to face.

"What's that to you?" he rasped.

"I'm takin' 'em up," said Hashknife.

"Takin' 'em up!" gasped Peter Guest.

The rest of the crowd stared at Hashknife, who nodded to the banker.

"You can't take 'em up," growled Guest. "The time has run out. At least it has on the AH and the Circle Star."

"I'm takin' 'em up," said Hashknife slowly. "I don't know how much money it takes, but I've got enough here. You just count this out, will yuh?"

Hashknife reached inside his shirt and took out the two packages of bills he had found beneath the floor in the Ironclad money-box. Peter Guest stared at it for

a moment, his face twitching. He looked at Hashknife, but was unable to speak.

"Go get them mortgages," said Hashknife curtly. "You know what that means, Peter Guest. Bring all three of 'em, and cancel 'em right here. Mark 'em paid in full or whatever yuh do to ruin 'em."

Peter Guest's face went white. He wanted to protest, to do something; but the level stare of those gray eyes forced him to turn around. He went to a desk, where he had piled papers from the ruined safe, and drew out the three mortgages. He came back with them clutched in his hands, his eyes looking nervously from face to face.

He put them on the counter in front of Hashknife, like a man in his sleep. There was a sudden thump. Jawbone Irving had kicked himself on the ankle to see whether it were a dream. Hashknife did not turn to see how the rest of them were taking it; he was watching Peter Guest, who drew back from the counter.

"Yuh don't need to cancel these, do yuh, Peter Guest?" asked Hashknife. "If they just take 'em, that's all, eh?"

"Yes," said Peter Guest thinly.

"Here's yours, Dad," Hashknife slid one aside. "And this one belongs to you, Wash Reid. You can take the other one and give it to the boys at the Circle Star."

"My God!" breathed Wash Reid. "What does it mean?"

"And Peter Guest," said Hashknife calmly, "it's too bad Jimmy Condon didn't live to enjoy the Ironclad."

Peter Guest jerked a trifle and his head seemed to settle down in behind that huge collar-button.

"It's too bad yuh didn't search him further, Peter Guest. Yuh know yuh overlooked two twenty-dollar bills when yuh put him out of the way and slipped a faked bank-book in his pocket. Yuh knew he'd never draw that money, and yuh knew he didn't have any relatives."

Peter Guest did not speak. He seemed paralyzed. Then he turned his head and looked at the ruined vault. His action was like that of a mechanical toy, jerky, unreal. Then he turned and walked toward the vault, going very erect. He stumbled over the twisted threshold and disappeared.

For a moment no one moved. Then Hashknife jerked back, grasped the counter with both hands and vaulted over. But before his feet struck the floor, came the dull thud of a revolver shot inside the vault. Hashknife stopped short, staring toward the vault door.

"I might have known he'd do that," he said slowly.

"My God, has he shot himself?" exclaimed Wash Reid.

"That's all there was left for him to do," said Hashknife. "He knew he was cinched."

"Cinched?"

"Yes."

Hashknife went into the vault, the others crowding closer, but he came right out.

"Let him alone for the sheriff to see," he said. "He done a good job—at last."

Jawbone Irving had decided that if he was walking in his sleep he would do his walking in the street where there was more room. A crowd of horsemen swung in past the front of the bank, and Jawbone woke up.

"There's the sheriff he yelled. "They've got Bull Hampton."

The posse had jerked to a stop in front of the Peacock, as the folks came out of the bank.

"Ma, you and Miss Reid stay here," warned Hashknife. "Come on, Sleepy—Wash!"

Others were already running across the street, trying to tell the sheriff that Peter Guest had shot himself, and the street in front of the Peacock was a twisting mass of men and horses. Bull Hampton, his clothes almost torn off his body, was roped to a horse, and behind him on the horse was Cheerful Miller.

There was so much shouted conversation that it was impossible to know just what was being said, but Friday Jones was heard yelling:

"There's them damn shepherds, Sheriff! They're back again!"

Dan McKinley stepped from behind a horse, covering Hashknife with a rifle. William Freeman stepped off the sidewalk and walked around a horse, meeting Jawbone Irving. As quick as a flash Jawbone smashed him on the jaw, knocking him flat in the dirt.

"What's the idea of that?" demanded the sheriff.

"Jist payin' the dirty pup back for buyin' the letters from Tonto Potts that Bull Hampton and Milly Reid wrote to each other, that's why!" said Jawbone, blowing on his knuckles.

Hashknife saw Bull Hampton lean forward, trying to see Freeman, who was still flat in the dirt. For a moment the crowd was silent, and the sheriff glanced back at his prisoner.

"Was that true, Jawbone?" asked Bull.

"True as hell. Tonto died last night and before he died he told Milly all about it."

Bull lifted his head and looked across the street, where Ma Hampton and Milly were standing in front of the bank.

"What about Peter Guest shootin' himself?" asked the sheriff.

"He did, Splinter," said Wash Reid. "Don't ask me why; ask Hashknife Hartley."

"Ask Hashknife Hartley, eh?" Splinter Woods stared at the tall cowboy. "He knows, does he?"

"What's the idea of ropin' Bull Hampton?" asked Hashknife.

"I suppose you didn't hear about the bank robbery, eh?" sneered Dan McKinley.

"Yeah, I heard about it."

"Well, that's yore answer, shepherd. And what I want to know is, what in hell are you doin' here?"

"I'm with yuh on that," said Booze Haverty. "Wasn't you told to keep goin' feller?"

Hashknife nodded and smiled.

"Yeah, I'll admit we was, Haverty."

"You've got more gall than any shepherd I ever seen."

The crowd, enjoying the repartee, had moved to the front. Friday Jones, Andy Peterson and Harry McCall pushed their way through in front of the sheriff's horse evidently with the idea of having a front seat at the show.

"What evidence have yuh got against Bull Hampton, Sheriff?" asked Hashknife.

"Enough. He pulled that job, made his getaway as far as an old cabin on Hangman Creek, where his horse spilled him off and hurt his ankle. We found him holed up in the rocks."

"Find the money, too?"

"No, but we'll get it."

Hashknife laughed with evident enjoyment, and these hard-boiled riders, who had been in the saddle most of the night, scowled at him. They were in no mood for hilarity.

"Sheriff," said Hashknife calmly, "if you'll get off yore horse and come over here, I'll tell yuh somethin' yuh never thought about. It's a thing I want to whisper in yore ears."

The sheriff rubbed his big mustache and blinked at Hashknife.

"What's the idea?" he growled.

Hashknife laughed at him, but those who looked closely at him did not see any mirth in his eyes. He seemed to be looking intently at Friday Jones. The sheriff dismounted and came between Friday Jones and Harry McCall.

"Look out for a trick of some kind," warned Cheerful.

The sheriff came straight to Hashknife, and it seemed as if he felt ashamed of being whispered to in public. But he inclined his head. There was a dead silence —then Hashknife's harsh whisper, which was plainly audible:

"Look out for Friday Jones and his gang!"

It was almost the same as exploding a bomb in front of the two men from the Double Diamond. They sprang apart as quick as a flash, each man drawing his gun. Friday Jones struck his shoulder against the sheriff's horse and lost his balance as he swung up his gun, and the bullet sang six feet over Hashknife's head.

Hashknife did not dare to shoot. There

were men behind Friday Jones, men and horses who had no time to get out of the way. But Sleepy shot. He took a chance on Harry McCall—after McCall's first bullet had ripped through the side of his chaps—and McCall went down across Bill Freeman, who was trying to sit up.

Friday Jones swung around, confused, ducked under the neck of the sheriff's horse just in time to have Cheerful Miller fairly fall off the back of his horse on to him, and they went down in a smother of dust.

Peterson did not shoot. He realized the futility of such a thing. His only chance was escape, so he took that chance and headed across the street, going toward the horses at the rack in front of the post-office. But he didn't go far. Splinter Woods yanked the rifle from Dan McKinley's hands, threw it to his shoulder and fired quickly.

Peterson's left leg crumpled under him and he fell flat on his belly, slid to his hands and knees and sat down in the dust, his right hand going up to adjust his hat. His gun had been flung twenty feet away.

"I don't *sabe* it yet," declared the sheriff. "But it kinda looked like he invited me to shoot."

Men were trying to untangle Cheerful and Friday from under the horses, and everything was confusion for a few moments. Neither of them was hurt, but Friday Jones was now a very dejected person, his eyes, ears, nose and mouth filled with dust and his soul with a great dread.

"Now, damn it!" wailed the sheriff. "What's it all about?"

"Nothin' much, except that you got the three men that held up the Ironclad stage and killed Paul Vetter," said Hashknife. "You better put the cuffs on Bill Freeman, too. He was one of the prime factors."

Cheerful was the proud possessor of a pair, which he put on Freeman, who was still a little dazed from the punch he had received.

"How do yuh make that out?" demanded the sheriff.

Hashknife signaled the sheriff to keep still.

"Bring Freeman over across the street," he said to Cheerful. "The rest of yuh stay there a minute."

Freeman was able to walk, but Hashknife knew he was too dazed really to understand what had happened. The crowd stayed back, except the men from the Circle Star to whom Wash Reid was talking.

They set Freeman down on the sidewalk and he stared at his handcuffs.

"Is it true what they said about yuh, Freeman?" asked Hashknife.

Freeman stared up at him, and Hashknife decided that Jawbone must have had something in his fist beside bone and muscle to have knocked Freeman so silly.

"What was that?" asked Freeman dazedly.

"Friday Jones says you was the one who planned the robbery of the Ironclad stage, and that you helped blow the safe here last night."

They could see the color drain from Freeman's face, and his jaw dropped.

"They lie—he lies!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "Did he say that? Oh, he's a liar! Friday was the one. All I did was to tell them when the money was being shipped. They did it. Why, I was in the bank all the time!"

"How about last night, Freeman?"

"No," breathed Freeman. I—I let Friday have the key. They didn't get any money from the stage. It was a dummy. I don't know which one killed Vetter; I didn't. My God, what am I saying?"

"You've said quite a lot, I think," said the sheriff. He held out his hand to Hashknife and they shook hands.

They led Freeman back to the anxious crowd and faced Friday Jones.

"You might as well cave in, Friday," said the sheriff. "Freeman swears you killed Vetter."

Friday sagged visibly, but shut his jaw tightly. He was looking at Peterson, who still sat in the middle of the road, waiting for them to come and get him. McCall

was still alive when they carried him away, cursing deliriously.

The sheriff walked over and cut the ropes off Bull Hampton.

"Stay on the horse if it hurts yuh to walk, Bull," he said. "I don't ask yuh to forgive me."

"Thasall right, Splinter; it was a mistake."

Bull held out his hand and they shook hands warmly. The sheriff then turned to Hashknife, a queer expression in his eyes.

"I guess I'm a hell of a sheriff," he said.

"Yo're average," said Hashknife seriously, turning to meet McKinley, Haverty and Neeley. McKinley had the mortgage of the Circle Star in his hands.

"Hartley," he said huskily, "is this true? Does this mean that this—say, what in hell does it mean, anyway?"

"Peter Guest made yuh a Christmas present, McKinley."

"I don't understand."

He turned to the sheriff.

"Splinter, didja ever hear anythin' like this? Peter Guest gave back the mortgages to the AH, Circle Star and Tumblin' R, and then shot himself. He's dead in his own vault."

"Is that true, Hartley?"

"Shore."

"Oh, it's true enough," said McKinley. "Wash Reid and Dad Hampton were there; they heard it all. Hartley made him give 'em all back."

The sheriff tried to smile, but it was a failure.

"Well, this is a hell of a day," he said. "I'm shore all upside down. What's it all about?"

More men were joining them, and one was Frank Baker, the prosecuting attorney.

"What's all this?" he asked. "They say Friday Jones confessed to killing Vetter and robbing the bank and—"

"I didn't have the goods on Friday and his gang," smiled Hashknife. "When they went for their guns I felt sure they were guilty, but I had to get a confession from Freeman to cinch 'em.

"Sheriff, the fact that they found Bull Hampton's cache in that old cabin made me suspicious of 'em. I was the one who found the real payroll of the Ironclad. It was in a tobacco box, along with some tobacco. I swiped it, until I was sure who owned it. The money-box held a dummy roll. That was all right.

"But I got a hunch; so we went out to that cabin, where I lifted the floor. I didn't find Bull's cache, but I did find the money-box of the Ironclad stage, and I took out the dummy package and sunk the box in the creek. I've got a hunch that Friday and his gang had hid the box there, and when they found out it was only a dummy and that Bull had a cache in that cabin, they left it there to incriminate him."

"By gosh, that's right, Hartley. I saw 'em go there that day. I found Bull's cache. You went there after I did. But I never thought to search further."

"Well, it was there—over by the back wall. I had that dummy roll inside my shirt when this indignation committee ran us out of town, and I'm tellin' you I was scared stiff yuh might search me. Peter Guest did try to burgle my room and I caught him at it. He wanted that real fourteen thousand bad enough to burgle, and when I caught him he was game enough to write a confession in my notebook.

"And Peter Guest had me guessin'. The fact that he came in here and bought out a cow-town bank, without anybody knowin' where he came from or who he was. It kinda struck me that Peter was buryin' himself in an out-of-the-way place for a reason. There's always a reason, if yuh dig deep enough. It kinda looked as though I was going to be run out before I had a chance to find out, but I had the reason inside my shirt.

"Every bill in that dummy package was a counterfeit. They wasn't even good counterfeits. He had printed 'em on common bond paper, and they wouldn't fool a child. And any man who owns the plates that make money thataway is liable to a mighty long stretch in the pen.

Mebbe he was foolish enough to think he could use them dummies for bait and catch the men who stole 'em; but he was shore layin' himself wide open when he printed 'em.

"Mebbe he thought he was so far out here in the country that nobody would ever question that money. He wanted a dummy package of money that would shore look good at a glance, and there might be a possible chance of the robber tryin' to pass some of it. Anyway, I reckon he felt safe. He was Peter Guest, who owned most everythin' in the country, and he thought his past was so far behind him that he was safe.

"And then I saw the money yuh took off Jimmy Condon, after yuh found him dead in a prospect hole. It was fine. In fact it would pass almost any old place, but I took my knife-point and tried to lift out one of the silk threads on the bill, but they didn't lift. They had been put on with a fine pen-point and colored ink. Peter Guest bought out that bank with bad money, I think. Then he got most of it back, I suppose. Luck broke for him and he was able to play with real coin, but he started crooked and he ended up in his own vault."

"I swear I never heard anything like it before!" exclaimed the prosecutor. "Of course those mortgages are null and void. There's no bank left to handle them. We'll just have to call it a misdeal and start over again."

Cheerful came back from the jail, panting heavily.

"Say!" he gasped. "Peterson and Friday got sore at each other, and Peterson swears that it was a lie about Friday not having a gun that night when Bull shot him. They sure framed Bull that time! Oh, I told Bull about it when I came past the gang over there, but he didn't pay no attention. He was too busy lookin' at that girl, I reckon.

"And Peterson says he'll show yuh where the money is that they got from the bank last night. It's cached out at the Double Diamond. They was all set to pull out of the country. Peterson says that Freeman made 'em promise to not open that money-box until the thing kinda died down, so they hid it under the floor in that old cabin."

Cheerful stopped and took a deep breath. His wife had shoved her way through the crowd and was looking at him wonderingly. She was still carrying a tray.

"You're not hurt, Cheerful?" she panted.

"Not me," said Cheerful blankly. "I'm fine, I am."

"Oh, they said you got hurt!"

"Uh-u-u-u-uh; not me!"

He moved over closer to her.

"You—you waitin' on somebody, Genevieve?" he asked.

"No," she shook her head foolishly and looked at the tray.

Cheerful grinned foolishly and took her by the arm.

"Well, yo're goin' to," he said seriously.

He turned her around and they went back toward the hotel. Splinter Woods started to laugh, but checked it.

"Love's a wonderful thing," he said. "She was off him for life, but when she heard he got hurt she forgot what she said—jist like I forgot to make Friday and his gang quit wearin' guns in town. But yuh can't think of everythin', I suppose."

Hashknife smiled shortly and took out his bank-book, handing it to the lawyer.

"Here's the fourteen thousand deposit," he said. "It don't belong to me—and it's goin' to take a lot of lawin' to find out who does own it. Unless I miss my guess, you'll never find a relative of Peter Guest, because I don't suppose that was his name.

"If I was in yore place I'd search his home. You'll probably find the plates that the money was printed from. Uncle Sam will be glad to get 'em. And that's all, I reckon."

"My God, that's enough!" exclaimed McKinley. "And a lot of us jug-heads tried to run yuh out of the country!"

"Well," smiled Hashknife, "yuh didn't succeed."

"Which is one thing Blue Joint and Rainville will always be thankful for,"

said the sheriff. "Look at them folks over across the street, will yuh? Dad Hampton is twenty years younger. Hartley, there's a lot comin' to you and yore pardner. I dunno how in hell we'll ever show yuh how we feel."

"Well, that's all right, Sheriff. If you folks will excuse us for a minute or two—I've got some business of my own to transact."

He headed across to the post-office, with Sleepy close behind, avoiding the crowd near the bank. Hashknife bought paper and an envelop from the postmaster, who was so excited he could hardly make change.

Hashknife took the stub of a lead-pencil and wrote:

> Dear Bill Westfield:
> Sorry but we couldn't put over the deal. The price was too high.—H. HARTLEY.

He placed it in an envelop, which he directed to Westfield, at Teton Wells. Then he took out the check for one thousand dollars and two one-hundred dollar bills, which he also placed in the envelop, sealed and dropped it into the slot.

Sleepy's nose wrinkled sadly, as they walked back to the street and untied their horses. The crowd were all together in front of the bank now, and the sheriff was taking out the body of Peter Guest. No one was looking toward the post-office; no one realized that the principal actors in their little drama were making their exit.

Hashknife and Sleepy swung into their saddles and looked at each other quizzically.

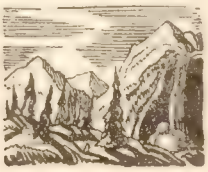
"Well, I'm glad that job's over," sighed Hashknife.

"So'm I, cowboy. Which way do we go?"

Hashknife turned slowly in his saddle, his eyes searching the far horizon. As he swung back to the south he made a short gesture with his left hand.

"There's a strange hill," he said simply, and they rode away.

There was nothing left to do, except to accept praise from those concerned, and they did not want to be praised. The strange hill was calling; they wanted to see what was on the other side.



With Captain Cook to the South Seas Dark Latitudes

By R. E. HAMILTON

IT WAS a fine July day when we sailed, in the year of grace 1768. I remember the afternoon sun reflected on the roofs and flower pots of London, gleaming on the brasswork of the ship and even on the silver-topped canes and the shoe buckles of those who came to bid Godspeed to the *Endeavor*.

It was a distinguished throng that saw us away, for it was by the king's pleasure we went, and under the direction of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty. Members of the Royal Society had bickered like ruffled birds over the command of the ship, and Sir Hugh Palliser, late Governor of Newfoundland and friend of him who had at last been chosen master, had selected our bark out of an hundred fair ships that lay rocking in the Thames.

Of all who came to the docks at Deptford Yard, though it was a day of long ago and memory may be colored by the renown of these men, I seem to recall the discomfited Alexander Dalrymple of the Royal Society, who would have given his right arm to command the expedition, and his sworn foe, the great Sir Edward Hawke, head of the Admiralty, who by refusing him a brevet commission had dashed Dalrymple's hopes to the ground.

Sir Hugh Palliser was there, and I think Captain Wallis, just returned from a voyage around the world, and many scientists beside—stooped men with square spectacles, their eyes full of weights and measures, their coat-tails dabbling unheeded in the mud and wharf litter.

And amid a group of ladies who picked their dainty way through the pitch and oakum and coils of tarred rope I saw her who had been Elizabeth Batts of Barking before she had married our commander. An amiable and gentle face she had above her sprigged gown and *fichu*, but her eyes were wistful, and I remembered that one month from her wedding day her husband had embarked for America and the War with France, that for six years he had been most constantly at sea and that now at last he sailed away into uncharted oceans and the islands of the cannibals. It is a mournful thing to be a sailor's bride.

Eighty-four persons were our company, including the botanists and astronomers. Eighteen months' food we carried and ten carriage and twelve swivel-guns upon our decks.

I had neither kin nor friend to wave me farewell so I stood by the taffrail watching the others board the ship.

Presently there came one with instruments, and servants following behind bore telescopes and a box with a quadrant. This would be Mr. Green, I thought, from the Royal Observatory at Greenwich. With our commander he would observe the transit of Venus from an island of the southern seas already determined on. Poor scholar, his notes and charts, arranged in careful piles, were destined to come safely back to London for the unending advancement of science; but he was buried miserably at sea from a rotting ship on the last lapping of the homeward voyage.

Two more who, followed by a greyhound, came in the garb of fine gentlemen, very anxious as to the disposal of certain phials and books, and alert and eager for all the preparations for departure, I took for Mr. Banks and Dr. Solander, skilled in botany and medicine and natural history, who, in the interest of science and humanity, were making the voyage. The ship's surgeon came then, and Mr. Sporing, assistant to Mr. Banks, and several more.

And now came those seamen who mustered last—old dogs who feared neither thirst nor scurvy nor shipwreck nor the unknown, but thought with wet lips of the reputed wealth of the Indies, the easy barter with the natives and the brown girls of the islands. A few had sailed with Wallis and Cartaret and one had gone with Middleton searching for the Northwest Passage.

And there was one, I thought, had never been to sea, for his face showed no tan, his gait was steady, with the short steps of a landsman, and though his hands were seamed and hardened they were not bronzed on the backs. He was from Cornwall by his accent, and black with hair. There was a growth of beard upon his jowls and chin though I learned afterward he was probably but six hours shaved.

Deep fines ran from nose to mouth-corners and between the nostrils to the lip, making a cleaved triangle on his face. It gave him something of the physiognomy of an Irish lad but he had none of an Irishman's buoyancy. He was below average height with being stoop-shouldered and his head slung low like a bull's, but his muscles were vast and his hands made me think of the bunches of red bananas which ships from the south brought to London wharves—only they were harder than the fruit of stone.

Mr. Banks at that moment returned to the wharf in search of a forgotten instrument and stared at the dark seaman. I heard him remark to Dr. Solander—

"There goes a man with hate riding astride his heart."

"If he has an enemy I hope I am not he," said Dr. Solander, and they laughed.

Eighty-four came on ship that July day. I can see them trundling their barrows throught the sunlight, carrying tin boxes and seamen's chests. I can count them off by name. Eighty-four. Only half came home again, and they bitten by scurvy and wasted by fever—but that does not concern us here.

BEFORE evening we sailed and anchored in Plymouth Sound on the thirteenth of August. And having a favorable wind on the twenty-sixth we got under way for Madeira.

It was fair weather that day, but the equinox was at hand and Mother Carey's chickens flew past and the crew were put to work roving the chafing gear and tarring the ropes against a sudden gale.

I was patching a spare sail with my needle and palm, squatting near the mainmast, and so it happened that I was at hand for the meeting of the man from Cornwall with his enemy.

Being a green hand he had been ordered aloft to slush the mast, and he was descending with pulley and rope, daubing as he went, with little skill in his great curled hands, when Mr. Monkhouse, a midshipman, passed below. A splash of grease fell from the Cornishman's brush

to the deck in front of the midshipman causing him to look up at the same time the black man looked down, and a look flashed from the seaman's eyes like a flame of light.

Whether it was the look or the sun I did not know then—and afterward I learned it was because he thought a ghost was squatting there among the shrouds and sheets—but Mr. Monkhouse stepped backward with one foot and shaded his eyes with both hands.

So they remained motionless, looking at each other.

"Come down," said Mr. Monkhouse, at last, and clumsily but calmly the Cornishman came, with his pulley and rope and bucket.

"You are new to the sea?"

"Aye," said the man from Cornwall.

"What is your name?"

"Forkney, as 'ee well know."

"Rather as I should have known. You are very like your—was he brother?"

Forkney did not condescend to nod, but stared at Monkhouse under black brows that met and almost crossed each other over his nose.

They were not alike, those two. Monkhouse was slender, pale and fair. I did not think he was strong, especially for a seafarer, for one of his forearms could almost have been spanned by the red paw of the Cornisher, and his chest was narrow, but he carried himself commandingly and he was tall.

Then I looked at the man from Cornwall and saw that the three lines from nose to mouth were etched white on his black face.

Mr. Monkhouse dropped his hands helplessly to his sides.

"It is not a pleasant thing to kill a man," said he, "and it is a miserable thing to meet his brother afterward."

"As a murderer," replied Forkney. "Aye, that it should be."

"I am no murderer," said Monkhouse. He said it gently. As for me, I would have flung it out if Forkney lied and followed the assertion with my fist, but he was always a quiet-tempered man and he was grieved to meet the brother of him he had killed.

"Ho, ho!" the black man laughed with a hollow sound like a voice in the sea caves of his own stormy country. "There is the word of three against 'ee."

"A boatswain and two seamen. Yes, I know. But of slaying, not of murdering."

"Talk," said the Cornishman. "Tush! I have little to do wi' words, nor the manners of men at sea. But murder I know." And he stirred the brush around the bucket of grease and grinned as if he wished it were a bowl of Monkhouse's blood.

"Why are you on this ship?"

"To kill 'ee, to be sure."

The midshipman looked out to sea and leaned wearily against a hatch.

"I am sorry to earn your hatred. But it will go hard with you if you knife me or do other devilment when I am unaware. There is no discipline or punishment as swift as that at sea. They will hang you from a yard-arm."

"The voyage will be long and I will bide."

"I am a marine," said Monkhouse pensively, "and you are a common seaman. I could cause you to be flung into the lazaretto now for threatening an officer."

"Your commander is a fair man. There is talk of he along the docks, and how her served in the colonies—and before Quebec. Her will not keep me in irons while I do 'ee no harm."

With that, with his pulley and rope, he climbed the mast again and went on about his sloshing, clumsily but calmly. And when scattered drops fell on the midshipman, though it was not by Forkney's intent, yet I could see he was not sorry.

Mr. Monkhouse shrugged at last and would have gone away had he not rounded the hatch and come upon me squatting at my sail and trying to appear as if I had not heard.

I was not apt with the needle, as he saw, looking down on me.

"Have you sailed before, lad?" he asked. "What is your name?"

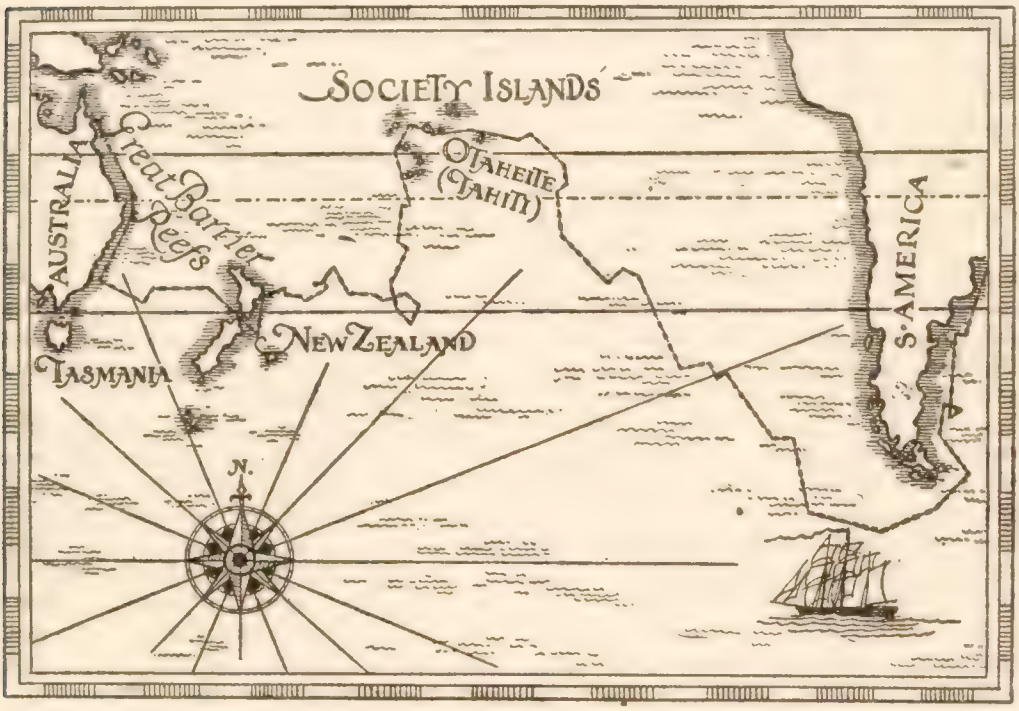
I told him and added with civility that I had been once to the colonies and twice by vessel to Marseilles.

"You have been to school and have conversed with gentlemen."

He knew this by my speech, for it was not rough like the seamen's, and emboldened by his interest I told him of our farm holdings in Devon, the lawsuit that lost them, and my mother's death.

"And then," I ended, "there being neither home nor kin remaining, I went to sea."

He asked me if I could draw and cipher,



for if I could, one day they might bring me into the cabin and teach me navigation. No one knew the length of the voyage nor how thinned the ranks might be nor who would be promoted.

All the while I hoped he would speak of the matter between Forkney and himself, for he knew I must have heard, but though he talked of other things his lips were sealed here and my curiosity burned unquenched.

I thought him a pleasantly spoken man. Then, while he stood above me, two seamen—one from Belfast and the other from Cork—who had been putting on the chafing gear and had run afoul each other, being natural born foes though each had scarcely seen the other before, began to hurl insults in the rigging and presently descended to the deck to fight it out.

Mr. Monkhouse ran to them and ordered them to stop, but whether they did not hear him, amid their roars, or did not see him through their rage, or else—and this I think most likely—they considered so slight a man of little moment in their great desire for one another, they paid no attention and he could not part them at all, and Forkney on the mast laughed with delight to see an officer ignored.

A dozen seamen came running to see the fun and the cook stuck his head out of the galley and the greyhound of Mr. Banks barked and leaped about the men. Those who watched began to take sides and even blows fell among them. Then, as suddenly as it had begun, the excitement subsided.

Another man had come on deck, and I will take the opportunity to describe him now, though in history he has already been painted many times. Lest it be said that long years in his service have made me see him through rose spectacles, it needs only to read his records and the opinions of scholars to agree that no better mariner ever trod a deck, and no more intrepid explorer and—though his father had been a common farm-laborer and his mother a servant girl—no braver gentleman.

Nor did the fact that great nobility were afterward proud to be in his company and that he was decorated with golden medals and praised by the King ever make him oblivious of his humble origin or of his understanding of the lowly born.

In our long and arduous voyages there was no danger where he did not go before the crew, and more than any captain up to his time did he take pains to safeguard their health, having the ship cleansed and smoked, the wood rinsed in vinegar, the drinking water purified He had warm clothing made for them, medicines brewed and vegetable foods contrived that would keep them from the terrible scurvy; so well that, on our second voyage, when the experience of our first had schooled him after three years at sea, we returned to England with the loss of only one man by sickness, the like of which had never been known before.

Ah, well, enough. He seldom enters this tale. But from acquantance with such a man I am convinced that only those who achieve fame from the lowest ranks are truly great, for only they can understand every condition of society. He was christened James Cook. He was only lieutenant now—the rank of captain came on his return—but he was commander of our expedition.

When he came upon the forecastle the men fighting fell away and those about them slunk back abashed and the cook withdrew his head into the galley. Only the dog barked, but it was still when the commander stroked it.

He stood tall against the sunlight, under the snapping sails, his brown eyes darting under beetling brows, his brown hair and the riband that secured it—after the fashion of the day—moving in the breeze. His saber-scarred hand rested on the head of the dog, and there was that about him that held the attention of every one. His words were few and simple, as was his manner always.

"We are eighty-four men," said he. "We are embarked on a voyage where we shall see the known continents of the world and maybe some others besides. The elements and ignorance of the way are pitted against us. Wherever there is land we shall find hostile savages and uncharted harbors; wherever there is not, thirst, hunger and disease. Nevertheless, like all of you, I am eager for the adventure. But if we do not hold together, if one man's hand is against another's instead of all against disaster, we are lost."

With that he went away. The two fighters silently picked up their shirts and went below, nor crossed fists again for the duration of the voyage—and little more can be said of the power of a man who can keep apart two Irishmen.

Mr. Monkhouse had been especially attentive to the commander, but the man from Cornwall, above the heads of every one and with no one noticing but me, had given him not the slightest heed, and had gone on with his greasing. Here, I thought, is a hatred that neither authority nor appeal to our common cause can put down, and one of these men will never see England again.

WE STOOD for Madeira and on the thirteenth of September anchored in Funchiale Road. All manner of courtesy was shown our ship. Fresh fruits and supplies were freely given us. The good nuns from the Portuguese convent, hearing that there were scientists aboard, received them happily and begged them to find a spring of fresh water within the cloister walls and to do other miracles which they believed by their learning they should be capable of.

Having taken leave of our hosts we weighed anchor again and sailed to the south and the west, and two weeks later Teneriffe's peak glowed at sunset to our leeward.

It is not my purpose here to describe all our voyage, but I will give an outline of our path. We touched at Rio de Janeiro, where the stone houses are balconied and the citadel of St. Sebastian dominates the town, and young boys as church mendicants march in processions at night, carrying brightly colored lanterns in such numbers that the city seems ablaze.

We landed also at Tierra del Fuego, than which there is no more desolate region on earth, and we doubled the Horn, instead of passing through the Straits of Magellan, which at that time many mariners were wont to do. Nor did we experience such wild storms as we had been led to believe whirled constantly about that region.

Now for many a long month we saw no land at all, only weeds and birds, now and then a seal, and mostly clouds and waves, until April came on the wings of the trades. Then the lookout sighted an oval island, lying like a flattened ring on the sea, with a lagoon in the center, with palm trees and fruits growing, and surf dashing on the sunny shore, and to our starved eyes fairer than Eden Garden.

For several days we sailed between green isles until a large body of land was seen from the masthead, lying like cumulous clouds to the far west, and we knew it to be that which Captain Wallis had named George the Third Island, though the natives called it Otaheite*. Here it had been arranged we should observe the transit of Venus.

Strange naked men came in canoes toward the ship, their boats heaped with plantains and coconuts for barter. They waved aloft green branches which we, taking, placed in our rigging as a sign of peace. And amid these propitious advances we went ashore.

Now during the voyage the conduct of Forkney had been such that none could complain so far as his willingness or his spirit went. For though he would never make a good seaman when it came to a task of nicety—such as replacing the seizings and coverings of the standing rigging—yet he was willing to go aloft in the fiercest weather and undertake his share of danger. Like our commander he was impervious to cold or heat or wind or coarse fare.

Nor did ever a word pass between him and the midshipman in any of our deck routine. I believe most persons were unaware of their enmity. As for Monkhouse, he dealt more gently with him than the rest in his infrequent instances of authority—for he was only a petty officer—and seemed of a mind to propitiate him.

Once, indeed, when we had entered the Strait of Le Maire, near the Horn, and the tide turned against us, raising a terrible sea wherein we plunged head on, our stern rising behind us at a dangerous angle for every wave, at a time when the bowsprit was deep under water and each of us clinging to whatever shroud or rail afforded grasp, Forkney reeled hard against Monkhouse and all but knocked him from the prow into the water. But so great was the confusion, the noise and the violence of our motion, that no man—not even the midshipman—could swear it was intended.

AT OTAHEITE we were released from the ship and we halloed with joy until the hills rang and the children fled to the huts. While our commander, with Mr. Banks and a party, were making excursions into the island, parleying and exchanging presents with the chiefs, the seamen wandered about the shore or lay in the gentle embrace of the trade winds, eating the breadfruit and plantains, drinking the cool milk of the cocoanut and paying respects—if such they could be called—to those of the women who were comely and not too old. Soon Lieutenand Cook ordered a fort and observatory to be constructed and, this being completed, we were once more, for the most part, free.

* Tahiti.

Now there was on the island of Otaheite a peninsula, or reef of coral, through the holes of which the water came in spouts with the rise and fall of the waves. On the sheltered side of this Mr. Monkhouse believed there might be good fishing and he and I betook ourselves thither for an afternoon's sport. But we had little success, not being as apt as the natives, and we separated presently, he going to the extremity of the reef and I within the curve of it, where the water was less troubled.

As I sat there under the hot sun, a stronger gust of the Trades blew my hat from my head, making me turn around to catch it. And this was surely an act of providence, otherwise I would never have looked behind, for the seething and spouting of the water concealed any other sound.

Forkney was striding over the reef, between the midshipman and me, but very much nearer Monkhouse. He had passed my fishing nook without pausing, apparently having interest only for his object, and this he went at as deliberately and directly as a child who comes at last in sight of something long desired. He went without any attempt at concealment, floundering now and then among the chunks of coral and barking his knuckles and knees without heed.

I jumped to my feet and shouted to a group of men on shore, but they could not hear me for the noise of the water. Though I danced and waved my hat I could not catch their eyes, and Forkney was only two rods distant from Monkhouse now. Then I bethought me of my small pocket-mirror, and in an instant had it out of my belt and flashing brightly in the sun. Its gleam smote the commander in the eyes so that he winced and stared at me, then, sensing the trouble, ordered a canoe to be launched for the point at the same moment that Forkney hurled himself at his foe.

The midshipman had seen Forkney and got into position and, when I reached them, was having the worst of it. He had drawn a hanger, but the arm that held it was wavering like a ribbon in the paw of the black man. At my appearance the Cornishman snarled and flung me away with one hand, so that I splashed off the rocks up to my waist in churning water. He was strong as a baboon. Though I came at him again and again he threw me off and I believe he would have killed us both, given time, and dashed our hapless skulls together as cocoanuts. But, while we fought, the canoe made a hazardous landing on the reef.

"What devilment is this, Monkhouse?" the lieutanant demanded. "The reef is a dangerous spot for horseplay."

"If you please, sir," said I, for Monkhouse was unwilling to answer, "Forkney attacked him without provocation."

"We will return to the beach to sift this thing," said Mr. Cook.

So when we had been paddled back in the canoe, with Forkney under guard for attacking a midshipman, he ranged us upon the white sand and asked each man his version.

"And I will speak and right willingly," said Forkney. "I have old scores to settle wi' he," jerking his thumb at Monkhouse. "On vessel out of Virginias her have done a foul murder on my good brother John, may the spirits of the water rest his soul. And her shall die for it, that her shall, even if I swing. On ship I ha' give him grace, for there are laws at sea I do not understand. But us are now on land again, where every man is what his own fists make him."

"He is speaking part of the truth," admitted the midshipman. "Returning to England on my last voyage his brother was on our ship, and a devilish heavy drinker he was. Though we confiscated his bottles, having trouble enough with him and his drunken fits, there was a keg of Antigua rum he had secreted under a board. And being thirsty from two weeks in irons he drank the half of it at a sitting and became mad. Then, coming on a group in the forecastle, he ran at us with a belaying pin so that it was necessary to shoot him. And I am as sorry as any one for it."

"'Ee would shoot a drunken man, would 'ee?" cried Forkney. "There's an arrant coward for 'ee. We be all hard drinkers at St. Just, when the mood is on us and a month's pay from the mines in our breeches. Then mayhap un chuck us in house with the door locked, to sleep our senses back; or if we be unmanageable give us a small tap on head to dizzy us a bit. But who e'er heard o' shootin' a drunken man, except some such pasty-colored chap like this, wi' arms like flower stalks and chest like a chicken's? A dirty coward!"

"Now ——!" cried Monkhouse, for he was in rage at last. "That's a lie!"

"Be that as it may," said Cook, "it is not my business to judge the matter for I was not there. But I will have no more of this while I am commander. And you are mistaken, Forkney. A man is not what his own fists make him, on land any more than on sea, until we are back in England again, according to Ship's Articles. Take him away, men, and keep him in irons for a few days. Perhaps he will be cooled."

So through the hot tropic nights Forkney lay in irons between decks, where no soft breeze could touch him, while the rest of us slept under tents ashore or on the windy deck. And though I think the lieutenant was right, still 'tis a poor way to cool off a Cornishman.

Now I will not dwell on how the transit of Venus was observed on a fine clear night with all success, nor on Queen Oberea of Otaheite, then in the waning of her beauty and power, nor on the pleasant barter with the natives, the presents of sweet-scented bark cloth they gave us, nor on the strange rites for the dead beneath the awnings.

But we made good friends among our islanders and filled our ship with meats and many fruits. So presently we sailed away, for it was on a voyage of discovery we were bound. Vast stretches of water to our westward lay unexplored and there was land to be taken in the name of King George the Third.

Once again at sea I saw there was a change in the attitudes of both Monkhouse and Forkney. For the taunt of coward had stung the officer and he was no longer gentle in his authority, while the Cornishman was no more the docile seaman about his duties. I think that all these months—a year indeed since we left England, for I remember celebrating with a Cheshire cheese and a barrel of good port the anniversary of our departure —the black man had looked to our expeditions ashore for the consummation of his revenge, and anticipation had made him calm.

But now that this hope and his delusion of shore discipline were banished together, it was with slack hands and a stormy face that he reefed or furled, braced, made or set the sail; nor did he ever join in a chantey. And when the midshipman was about, though he might rouse himself to display his superior strength, yet he mumbled harsh Celtic words into the wind or minced in imitation of a weak dandy over the deck.

WE WERE in 40° of latitude and longtitude 147° when I came to my watch one morning to find a heavy sea rolling on us from the west. Forkney came tumbling out also, with a bleak eye on the weather, and the clouds hovering like ravens' wings.

"'Twull be a fearsome day," he said, and took snuff, as a gentleman does, but in all his fingers, like an ape.

Indeed, as he spoke, the sea began running higher and I thought he must have called to it. For in our tales in the forecastle between watches he had sworn he acknowledged no God, nor spoke psalm nor collect, but prayed only to the spirits of fire, air and water, whither we all return, and there were those of the men who shunned him for it.

The order came to take in the topsails and reef the main, which we did in a driving rain, and presently we heard the command to furl the jib roared at us from amidships where Mr. Hicks fought a great sea we had shipped. Now this was of all posts the most hazardous at this

time, for it necessitated working out upon the bowsprit that continually dipped below the waves.

However, Mr. Monkhouse, wishing to set an example perhaps, swung himself out, and a second after, Forkney, who would not be outdone. There they stood, now shoulder deep in the curling seas, now high in the air as the ship rose. They clung to the spar while twice they were submerged, but after the passing of three seas which followed and surmounted each other like stampeding horses it was seen that Mr. Monkhouse had been swept from his foothold and hung feebly by one hand between the sky and the water.

The laughter of Forkney rang out on the gale and the midshipman was a sorry object before us all. Then John Barrow, a stout seaman from my own country of Devon, leaped out on the bowsprit, dragged him in and returned to help at the furling, which was dispatched neatly before more waves were upon them.

Some of us were supporting Monkhouse, about to go below, when we heard Forkney mocking after.

"That were man's work," he said, tingling with the exercise and the thrill of victory. "Nowt' o' the sort for her there, wi's puny strength. How her did look, dangling there like a plucked fowl, to be sure? Ho, ho!"

With that Monkhouse, weak as he was, struck him fairly between the eyes, and they would have been at it again if we had not hauled them away and below. And I knew at last that the hates in their hearts were equal.

We wore ship and stood to the northward. When the gale abated we bore on to the west, passing seaweed and seals and many birds. At length we sighted a new coast, being at this time two months away from land. The opinion of all was that at last we had found the Terra Australis Incognita, or a great island adjacent thereto.

There began a time of hardship. The natives of this country were not like our friends of Otaheite and the Society Islands, but darker and ugly. Darts and spears they carried, and pronged forks like Neptune's trident, and all manner of murderous weapons. Some let us come ashore, and where we went we found the bones of men, clean picked, or gristle marked by teeth in the provision baskets besides their fires.

Once we found a true cross set up in the ground, but ornamented with feathers, and the savages admitted it was the memorial of a man who had died, but refused to tell us his name, which set us to wondering greatly, since it is not their wont to bury their own dead, but to fling them into the sea.

At length we recognized this land to be that which the Dutch navigator Tasman discovered a century and a quarter before, and which charts now call New Zealand, and we proved that it was two islands by sailing between.

At this time we began to weary of our long voyage and there were those who said we would never see England again, but be kept floating among savages forever. The climate was not kind like that of the South Seas, and the surf roared and spouted to heights unimaginable. There was nowhere the abundance of fruit we had known, and our diet was fish and more fish, turtle and cockles if we were fortunate enought to find them, and moldy stores.

We must constantly make soundings with the pinnace ahead and our nights were full of fear, the sound of seas crashing on coral and the weary sight of the same unknown stars. Every man's temper was short except our commander's, and he ate harsh fare with no more thought than if it had been air he swallowed, nor suffered one locker to be broken into for his own consumption.

Every man had his own worry to solve and paid no heed to that of others, so only I watched Monkhouse and Forkney. Their hate grew terrible to see. When the midshipman passed the men hauling at the ropes the lines about Forkney's mouth would stand out as white as chalk marks, or if anything went wrong in the rigging, a sail backed against a mast or a

marlinspike fell down, Monkhouse would glare like the devil and whisper to himself that it was the fault of the Cornishman. Only fear of hanging kept them from killing each other by night—that and the fact that their sleeping quarters were apart.

Now some of us began to find signs of the scurvy on our limbs and in our mouths, and we hoped that, on reaching the coast of Van Dieman's land, the western side of which Tasman had explored, we would find more hospitality, both from the land and the natives. But in this we were disappointed, for in coming to that great land, which our commander renamed New Holland and a few call Australis, which is the largest island in the world—indeed they say a continent—all was barbarous, barren and wild and the native not to be propitiated.

Monkhouse, being one of the least robust of our company, was most afflicted with disease. When we would be ashore awhile, with fresh water and clean grass, he would eat of the tart berries we found and chew a root or a bark or so and be better. But when we returned to ship, as we would shortly do, he would be ill again. And besides making sores it seemed as if the scurvy sickened his blood, so that much of the time he could barely stand, but lay below in his berth or panting on the deck while we crawled in monotonous progress along that strange coast, full of sudden shallows and rocks rising like Neptune's lances from the deep.

"Stay by me, boy," he would say, grasping my hand and clutching his hanger to his side. "For now that I am low that fiend from Cornwall will come to kill me, if there is no one at hand to prevent it."

I would promise to keep near him and did so as much as my duties would permit and, when ordered to go with the sounders into the pinnace or to any task that took me out of his sight, I begged the merry old sailmaker, the ship's favorite, to bide with him. I thought of telling the officers of his danger, but the commander was most often near the helm at this dangerous period, and Mr. Hicks, the first lieutenant, I would not bother.

It was an open secret among us that he was wasting of a consumption and, though he walked among us still, soon need have no fear for rock or shallow or poisoned dart. Even Dr. Solander and Mr. Green —and Mr. Banks for all he was so kind to the Indians—I feared to approach for they were great scientists and might have no time for seamen's troubles. But finally Providence lessened the danger in a peculiar way.

A scurvy sore broke out upon the cheekbone of Forkney. It bothered him little, for his robust frame threw off poison easily and he did not mind a blemish on his complexion. Then either dirt entered and contaminated or the sore spread—or, as the seamen said, God was wroth at him for the malice in his heart—but first one eye swelled monstrously and turned red, and then the other, and the Cornishman went blind.

"We can not tell whether he will see again," said Solander and the ship's surgeon, "so great is the inflammation. But if we could ever rest ashore long enough to rid him of the scurvy there would be hope."

"We will find a harbor if I have to dredge one," swore the commander, looking around at his men who stood pale or livid and languid about the deck, and at the two poor Indians we bore as interpreters, lying near death. "I have gone a thousand miles without a safe place to ride the ship, but I will go a thousand more until we discover a place out of these shoals and whirlpools to anchor the *Endeavor* in safety and carry the sick ashore."

"Call on your spirits of earth and water to make us a harbor," jeered the seamen, circling around Forkney, but he only sat on a coil of rope, with his hands limp in his lap, and moaned to think he would never see the Cornish cliffs again nor the sun on the gorse nor the faces of his friends, the miners.

We moved on tediously and our commander gave names to the bays and

promontories we discovered: Smoky Cape, Bustard's Bay, Whitsunday Passage, Thirsty Sound. There came a fine moonlight night that bore a fresh breeze with it. We had seen shoals at sunset and stood off, casting the lead from time to time and intending to wait for morning before setting more sail. We were at twenty-one fathom and counted ourselves safe.

However, at table that evening, while we sat with cold stomachs for our pork that was bitter with must and our sad sea biscuits, we ran abruptly to twelve, ten and eight fathoms. All hands were ordered out, each to his post, and the anchor was ready to drop.

While we stood rigid and wondering who would be the fortunate ones to go off in the boats—for there were not enough for all—and the seamen cursing the scientists who would surely be sent first, being of greater value to the world than they, the men at the lead cried out that she was deepening.

"This is the end of the shoals we sighted at sunset," said Mr. Hicks. "We are safe, gentlemen."

Now there were some who thought it best to cast anchor and wait for morning to verify our location. But the night was so fair, and without the sound of surf anywhere, that we trusted to the deep water prevailing and all but the first watch went below.

I REMEMBER it was a minute or two before eleven by the fat gold watch my mother had left me when a grinding jar came from below and half of us were hurled from our hammocks. The lantern swung crazily to and fro and the poor ship went on no more.

I scrambled on deck and fell against the sailmaker, who swore a jolly oath in the dark.

"Fishes will have us tomorrow, lad," he said. "Fishes or cannibals, which will ye choose?"

There were others already outside and more came, quickly lest they be caught below, yet lingering in dread to learn the truth, for nothing could be more horrible than shipwreck in these desolate latitudes.

"Lower the longboat and sound on all sides of the ship," ordered Lieutenant Cook, "and take in every sail."

The poor *Endeavor* leaned against the hidden rock like a stricken horse, panting every time the heavy surf broke on her. We found by the soundings that she had slid on to a ledge of coral and lay within a hollow of it, with only a few feet of water in some places around her. We struck our yards and topmasts then. The stream anchor and the coasting anchor were carried to the starboard side where deep water lay. We gave all our strength to the capstan, hoping when the cable grew taut to move the ship, but this was in vain.

We fell silent in our perplexity, and with all the sails taken in there was no sound aloft, only around us the sad beat of the surges and a mournful grinding, as the teeth of the coral bit closer into the *Endeavor's* heart. Then one by one we saw the sheathing boards float away and the false keel drift off in the moonlight.

"Now Providence help me," I thought quaveringly, for I was a youth yet with my beard not much grown and my full height still to be attained. "But I must go back into that dark ship and fetch out Monkhouse."

Below decks it was desolate and the lanterns swung dizzily, making everything unstable with shadows. The shock of the surf beating on us was so severe I clung to the companionway as in the worst storm and made my way slowly.

There in the steerage, where Forkney had no business to go—nor had I in ordinary case—I found them. The blind Cornishman must have smelled his way there like a ferret—and no knowing how long it had taken him. The space where the petty officers lay was wide and, because their hammocks were few, piles of rigging, old sails and other stores had been flung there to take up the extra room. These now pitched monotonously over the floor from the beating of the ship. There was the sickening smell of disturbed bilge-water in the air.

The chase must have lasted a long time —the blind man in pursuit of the weak— for a chest was pulled out as if Monkhouse had once hidden behind it, a chair was hurled aside and there were greasy handmarks on the wall where Forkney had groped his way. They were perfectly still now, Monkhouse making no sound that might give his presence away and Forkney quieting his own harsh breathing the better to hear the other's.

The midshipman was in a hammock, huddled in the far end of the room and the Cornishman in the exact center of the floor, facing him a little uncertainly, yet covering escape through the door, and all the time advancing slowly. It was a game of blind man's buff such as I had never seen before.

"Mr. Monkhouse, come now if you will, sir," I said sharply. "The ship has struck and she is filling. I will manage the seaman; in this state he is no match for me."

I hurried to the hammock to help the sick man down, but as for Forkney I need not have threatened. For at the bitter news of the ship he sank upon the floor, nor tried to hinder us. Only a more bleak look spread over his sightless face than I have ever seen, and he turned away that we might not look upon it.

Far overhead I heard the voice of Mr. Hicks.

"There are two feet of water in the hold. We can not last."

"I can walk, boy, if you give me an arm at the ladder and let me rest midway," said Monkhouse. "Let us go."

I looked at the blind man, but he would not deign to petition us, only dropped his head lower on his hairy chest and I was afraid to touch him. So we left the steerage and made for the ladder and at its foot Monkhouse must rest.

All about us we heard the patter of rats leaving their holes. A seaman from Biddeford knocked us out of the way and climbed the ladder, a roll of possessions in his arms.

"For God's sake, sir, get your strength quickly," said I. For the nearer we approached the air the more my panic quickened like a child's who leaves a dark cellar.

"There is time," said Monkhouse. "I know the feeling of a sinking ship and it is not yet. Only two feet of water? There is time—" he sighed—"to go back."

He arose unsteadily. I groaned, believing the scurvy had reached his brain.

"Please, Mr. Monkhouse, that is not the way, sir. Here is the ladder; lean on me."

But already he was going back, and, throwing up my hands in despair and with many a mournful look at the vanishing patch of evening sky, I followed.

The Cornishman sat where we had left him, with his head hanging.

"Forkney," said the midshipman, "I am not a strong man as you have pleased to call to the crew's attention many times. Nevertheless, I am able to guide you, I think, if I may lean on the boy now and then. Take my hand, Forkney."

For some moments the dark man made no reply. Then he rose cumbersomely, with averted face, and clutched the midshipman's coat—he would not touch his hand. And in this fashion we climbed the ladder toward the sky.

On deck we found the greatest confusion. The men, who worked without any sign of panic or disobedience, had been ordered to lighten the ship, and on all sides ballast was splashing into the sea, besides casks, spoiled stores, oil jars and everything that could be done without. With a pang I watched six splendid cannon go overboard and prayed the more desperately that we might not be stranded among the cannibals.

We had lightened her fifty ton and started the pumps when dawn came and the sight of land eight leagues away. It was too far to swim, too far to carry the crew in relays in the boats. At high tide the *Endeavor* lacked a foot and a half of floating.

"Be of good cheer, the night tide will be stronger," said Lieutenant Cook. "And overboard now with every last thing we can spare! Besides the anchors

already out we will carry the two bower anchors starboard and astern and prepare the blocks and tackles to give us purchase. At high water we will heave on all the cables at once and, God willing, draw the ship off the ledge."

But at the next rise of the tide the water poured into the ship faster than the pumps could work, though the third and last one was brought into play. They were plied ceaselessly and the water from the hold streamed over our feet. The men could not work more than five minutes at a time, the sick ones lasting less than that, and when they had finished they sank in despair upon the flowing deck. They began swearing feebly and whispering to one another—

"It is no use—the leak gains."

I felt some one pluck me.

"What is the noise?" asked Forkney, bewildered by the *sludge, sludge* of the pumps. "They drive the water from her hold? Ho! I ha' jerked many a pump in our mines by the sea. Gi' us grasp on one. I'll show you how a Cornishman works, blind though her be."

A weary seaman was glad to relinquish his hold, and we set Forkney to his task. A man jumped to work beside him, but could not keep the pace. The crews of the other pumps were changed once, twice, three times, and still the man from Cornwall pumped alone.

"Gi' me a bit o' snuff," he said once. "If I are to save the gentlemen I'll act a gentleman." And it was done.

"That man will burst his heart," said Lieutenant Cook. "Relieve him, some one of you."

"He'll let no one touch him, sir," said Mr. Hicks.

My friend from Devon spoke up then.

"—— if I'll let a Cornishman and a blind one outdo me! There's as strong men in Devonshire as him!" And he seized a pump and worked it savagely.

"There's stronger in Zomerzet," cried another, and the belated honor of Dorset, Gloucester, Shropshire and Lincoln woke up all around me.

So with one county outdoing another in shifts, the men took new heart, especially since a mistake had been made in measuring the increase of water and we were not sinking as fast as we thought. And while the competition waxed hotter we gained on the leak at last. But Cornwall took the honors of the day, though having but a single representative. Forkney pumped an hour alone, then threw himself on the deck like a sack of coals, while the men crept around to stare at him.

At midnight came high water and fifty hands worked at capstan and cables. The anchors held fast to the coral bottom, and bit by bit we pulled the ship over the ledge into the deep water. Here the hold filled no faster than when on the rock, but the pumps must work as hard.

"We can not drive the men forever," I heard the commander tell Lieutenant Hicks. "Even the honor of Cornwall is flesh and blood."

"Our hope is for a harbor, sir."

"We have already searched a thousand miles to find one."

The midshipman beside me drew himself into a weak salute before the commander.

"There is a method known as fothering the ship, if I may tell you, sir. Once while we lay off Virginia a merchant vessel, moving out of the harbor, sprung a leak that admitted four inches an hour. But by this expedient it was stopped so well that the captain did not even return for carpentering but proceeded across the ocean in that condition."

Lieutenant Cook looked kindly at him, pitying his illness.

"Five men—more if they can be spared from the pumps—and all the materials of the ship are at your disposal, Mr. Monkhouse."

The seamen came forward—the sailmaker, his assistant and three more. Monkhouse ordered a lower studding sail to be brought and laid flat upon the deck. To this, working slowly because of his weakness, he stitched, with light needle, wool and oakum mixed and chopped very small in handfuls until the surface was covered deep. And upon this he caused

the sheep's dung and vessel filth to be spread thick, so that the waves would not wash the wool away.

Now the sail ropes were attached so that it could be extended horizontally, and with great care it was lowered over the bow until it was actually beneath the vessel. Still the men drew it under until a sudden tugging told them it had reached the leak. The suction was carrying the wool and oakum into the hole, clogging it gradually.

In a few moments we heard a shout from the man who was taking the depth of water in the hold, and the streams from the pumps began to lessen.

"One pump is sufficient now," said Mr. Hicks, coming up. "We can hold her easily."

At that Devon and Somerset, Gloucester and Dorset cheered together, and the commander said something quietly to Monkhouse. The seamen blessed him heartily and vowed he should be an admiral. We got up the mainmast then, and the yards that we had struck, and moved in toward the shore while the pinnace was sent to sound before us.

PROVIDENCE was with us at last, for after some hours search a harbor was found, a narrow one to negotiate, but safe, with fresh running water and a steep, sandy beach alongside which the ship was moored. Repairs were begun and the tents erected on shore for the sick.

"Put no tent 'twixt me and sky," said the Cornishman when they would have brought him under one. "Let only good green trees, that I never hoped to hear whustlin' again, be ower my head. And gi' me bark to eat, and scurvy grass if so 'ee find any, and let me be. My eyes will be well yet."

When my work was done I crept through the brush and sat beside him, honey on my tongue.

"Grog is handed out, Forkney. The men are drinking to you and your saving of the ship. And—" here I lied outright, though hoping heaven would forgive me for the good cause of it, and peering to see his face—"even Mr. Monkhouse acknowledges it."

"'Tis nowt'," he grumbled. "Tush! The seven sons of my father could each a-done it—and more. But her helped, the puny-faced chap, wi's plans from owerseas. Aye, gi' un her due. A brain is useful now and then."

In the tent the eight sick men were lying, cot to cot, grateful for the smell of earth and vegetation under the sun.

"Mr. Monkhouse," said I, preparing for only half a lie this time, "even the Cornishman is telling how your wit has saved us all. The men drink to you."

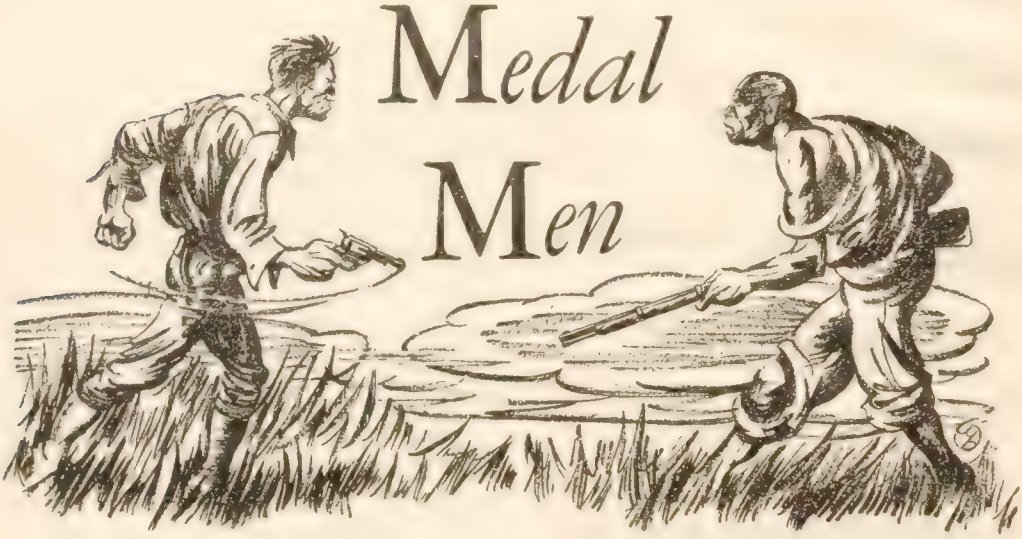
His face was flushed to a good color above his blanket.

"A simple scheme," he said. "I learned it in the colonies. As for the Cornishman, he's a strong man. He pulled well at the pump. A brave fellow." He fell asleep.

At twilight, walking on the grass, I found his hanger, that had slipped from his grasp, under the tent, and it lay rusting in the dew.

Haitian Voodoo and U. S. Marines

Medal Men



By JOHN WEBB

CIVILIANS and service men—whether soldiers, sailors or marines—should never mix; service men should keep to themselves. After a man's been in the service awhile he gets so he doesn't care much about civilians—particularly about the white-collar kind. That's the way I feel about it, anyway.

Thinking as I do, I wasn't overjoyed when this plump little fellow collared me and spattered me with words. The steamer *Colon* had just made fast to the pier, and he was the first person down the gangway, and he headed for me because I was the only marine in sight.

"Hello, buddy! I guess you can help me out—"

"Why the 'buddy'?" I cut in.

"Eh? Oh, I was in the outfit during the war."

"What war?"

"Eh?" His mouth dropped. I had taken some of the wind out of his sails. "Why, *the* war—you know, the one with Germany and Turkey and Aus—Aus—"

"Oh, that one. I've been in two or three since then."

"You don't say! That's fine!"

"It's ——," I contradicted him.

By his face, he disagreed.

"That war—that one with Germany and Turkey and Australia—"

"Austria!"

"Oh, yes. That was some sweet little mix-up, eh?"

"I can hardly remember."

He shook his head wonderingly.

"You see, I was only in one war—with Germany and Turkey and Aus—Austria."

"Australia."

"Eh?" He scratched his head. "Well, anyway, Sergeant, I was in it. Got a medal, too. See?"

He must have had the thing in his fist all the time. He waved it before my eyes, and darned if it wasn't a Congressional Medal! Can you imagine that? This pudgy, half-bald, dandified insect!

It got my goat. I took the medal from his hand and pinned it on his coat-front.

"Wear it there and you won't have to tell people you have it. Well, so long."

"Say, wait a minute. Maybe you can tell me where I can find a leatherneck named 'Buck' Malone?"

I stopped short.

"Buck Malone?"

"Yes. He was my buddy in France. We pulled together all through, did everything together."

"You supplied the money and Buck showed you how to spend it, huh?" I knew Buck Malone.

"Well, I had money and he didn't, most of the time, and what was mine was his and what was his was—"

"His own."

"Say, buddy, you stop that!" He was mad and funny. "Buck's a hero, he is. If you knew some of the things he did over there—"

He paused suggestively, but I didn't fall.

"The poor sap believes it himself," I thought

"Just a couple of weeks ago I got a letter from Buck saying he was in Haiti and in trouble—"

"They are one." I was trying to imagine him and big Buck Malone as buddies, and I had to grin.

"So I came down. Boss wouldn't give me leave so I quit my job. Good job, too—seventy dollars a week in an office—but I was sick of it anyway. No real he-man can ever be satisfied adding up two and two are four in an office. I haven't any home strings tied to me, so I'll either hook up with Buck in the marines or get him to buy out and come along with me—rambling around the tropics. Now if you can tell me where Buck is—"

"Buck," said I, "is in, or near, a six-hut town called La Miel. And if I were you I wouldn't let on I wanted him."

"Oh!" He screwed up one side of his face. "I get you, Sergeant. Buck's doing espionage work in the interior, eh? I'll keep it quiet, you bet. You say he's in—eh?"

"La Miel—that way." I pointed. I should have told him the truth, but I didn't—couldn't. He seemed so dumb I felt sorry for him.

"Thanks, Sergeant. I—" He saw I was about to make a break and put out his hand—a soft, white hand. "My name is Snedden."

"Mine's Carney. Good-by, Snedden—and good luck." And to myself, "You'll need it, my buckaroo."

As I left him I thought:

"There is a fellow who will be a nuisance all the rest of his life. He's still fighting the war, the one with the Austrialalians and them. His big adventure—well, it was quite an adventure, at that, but it's over and done. He should have stayed in his office where he could jellyfish along nice and peaceful and clap like mad every Wednesday and Saturday night when the news-reel shows the marines getting the situation in hand and keeping it there."

Him and his buddy talk! I let it go. This fellow had come all the way to Port-au-Prince because a former buddy shouted for help. And such a buddy!

His getting the Congressional Medal I put down as a fluke. It has happened.

I MET him next morning in the Rue des Miracles. He was riding a ten-dollar horse and had a big revolver at his hip.

"Hello, Barney!"

"Carney's the name, Schnitzlebaum."

"Eh? My name is Snedden."

"Oh. Where you going with that crowbait and that cannon?"

He grinned. Then he winked and looked cautiously around to make sure no one was within hearing.

"I'm going out to find Buck. He needs me bad or he wouldn't have sent for me. He knew I'd come. We were buddies, you know. I'm heading for—for—eh?"

"La Miel."

He yanked a folded stiff paper from his pocket and flipped it open; it was a road map of Haiti. After some search he put his finger questioningly on La Miel, and I nodded.

"But listen," I said, "do you know what a *caco* is?"

"Coo-coo, you mean? Sure, it's—"

"No. Coo-coo is what you are; I mean *caco*. I'll tell you what a *caco* is and then you can take that thing back to the boneyard and sell me that cannon cheap.

"A *caco*, fella, is a bandit or a revolutionist, according to how you look at it; he's a bad egg no matter how you look at it. They carry guns with smooth bores as big as stovepipe, jammed to the muzzle with old spikes, potlegs and brickbats. When full of *tafia* rum and *obeah* excitement they foam at the mouth and they like blood. Up to a short time ago you could buy human flesh in the open market here."

"You don't say?"

"Fact. Once in a while they sacrifice a goat to Vaudoux, the Green Python, and sometimes Vaudoux gets tired of goat and then they hold the sacrifice of the 'goat without horns.' You go out there and you'll be the goat. The goat, get me? Snedden, you don't want to go out there, honest you don't. Go back to your office and let Malone go to blazes." Say, what kind of a buddy do you think I am?"

"It's not you; it's Malone. He's no good. Here's something you don't know. He's been kicked out—dishonorably discharged, see? For general uselessness, brawling, trouble-making. The day before he was to be shipped north to the States he broke away and beat it into the interior. He's hiding there, the big rummy, and—"

"Gosh!" he exclaimed. "He is in trouble, isn't he?" And before I could stop him he kicked his bony horse in the ribs and went clattering off, bound for Hades and points west, the poor fool!

A LITTLE later, sitting in the Hotel Montagne with a cold bottle of German beer, I thought about him. How can you figure a guy like that? A bold buckaroo he was, with his fingers still ink-stained and his shoulders bent from humping over ledgers. Here he was in wild Haiti, the black republic, because a trench buddy needed him.

"Well, me lad," I thought, "go to it. You'll most likely slice up fine, you being soft and tender—but do I care? Ha-ha! Your throat'll be cut and there'll be one fool less."

The beer was flat, I guess; anyway, it didn't taste as good as usual. I went outside, kicked a sleeping "gook" off the veranda and got into his cab.

"Marine headquarters, *caco*."

"*Non, non, papa!* Me no *caco;* me got *bon habitant carte*."

Yeah! That's what they all say, these town gooks—they're good citizens and have cards to prove it, but actually ninety-nine out of every hundred are *caco* spies throughout the republic. That's what Snedden was up against. Barring the luck of fools, he wouldn't be a mile out of town before the Vaudoux drums would be broadcasting the news that a *blanc* was traveling the road alone.

I found the colonel in his office. He looked at me with his gimlet eyes and rumbled:

"Carney, if I saw a first-hitch leatherneck chatting with a civilian I shouldn't be surprized, but your name is dry on the books. He looked to me like a clerk on a vacation." The colonel had the old service man's scorn for men who worked in offices. "And he had powder on his face! I saw it!"

"Sir? Oh, him. Well, sir—"

"All right, Carney. Keep away from civilians. Now what do you want?"

"Two days' leave, sir. You promised me leave after what I did for you in Hinche—"

"You have a lot of nerve to remind me of it, but take the two days. And if you get drunk or in a fight, do it with a gob or a ship's coal passer or any kind of a *man!* Get out!"

"Yes, sir, and thank you," and I went away from there.

If I had stayed he would have told me again how many tons of cosmetics modern men used yearly and would ask what had become of the blood of our forefathers. In his opinion there was little manhood left—on the western plains, at sea, on railroads, among hobos, in the far north, among tropical freebooters; all the rest were simpering dandies and spineless worms. His opinion and mine ran pretty close together.

"I'm a darn fool," I told myself as I left headquarters.

But I did not like to think of that poor sap Snedden being served up as an offering to the Green Python. My idea was merely to overtake him and bring him back, haul him back, if I must. The remainder of my two-day leave I could spend nicely at the hotel or at the Seaside Inn, with German beer and five-star Barbancourt.

"The trouble with this guy Snedden," I mused, "is that an ancestor way back had good red blood in his veins and some of it dribbled down the line to this angleworm—just enough to cause him trouble; he hasn't the stuff to back it up. I'll send him back to his seventy-a-week and subway straphanging—that's his speed."

I GOT a good horse from a gendarme lieutenant friend of mine and pushed after "Stupid". But he evidently was making good time and, when I didn't come up with him when I thought I should, I left the main road and cut through the woods to head him off. The regular seven-o'clock rain came—you can almost set your watch by it; and then the sun ducked down—*plop!*—and it was night.

Night in the jungle means night. Dark? It was black, sticky, clammy black. After a while I gave up trying to guide my horse and let it pick its own way.

Of a sudden I realized that the jungle was throbbing with a low, dull sound, a rhythmic sound so deep and full that it filled the night solid and seemed to come from all directions at once.

Tonk - tonk - tonk - tonk - tonk. Vaudoux drums!

"Now," I asked myself, "is that for Snedden or Sergeant Carney? Or is it some ordinary hill message?"

It's funny how that sound gets you. It's so soft and gentle that at first you don't notice it; but after a while you do, and the longer you hear it the deeper it sinks in. You feel it rather than hear it, a sort of monotonous concussion, as with a wool-padded hammer against the sides of your head.

Tonk-tonk-tonk-tonk-tonk.

The jungle thinned out a little and the ground became rocky; then, a tiny cluster of yellow lights stood out of the blackness ahead. That was La Miel, but it wasn't La Miel I wanted; it was the camp somewhere to the south of it where I had heard Buck Malone was hanging out. The darkness had slowed me up so that maybe Snedden, if he had not got lost, had reached there already. I'd take a look and, if he was not there, go back along the main road and meet him.

That dreary *tonk-tonk-tonk* was beginning to sink in, and it occurred to me that I'd make just as acceptable a Vaudoux offering as Snedden. I must be cautious. I tethered my horse to a tree, took my rifle and went along on foot, my scalp tingly and my finger twitching on the trigger of my rifle. I was edgey. I blamed it on that deep, dull throb which never let up for an instant.

I crouched as a darker shadow at one side seemed to shift position.

"Keep that rifle down, you, and let that automatic alone!"

I obeyed, for I was looking squarely into the muzzle of a gun. And the voice behind it was unpleasantly cold.

"You lookin' for me?" asked the voice. "If yuh are, Carney, you're outa luck. I'm not goin' back."

That big, blocky figure bulking in the darkness; that voice. I knew him then. I grinned.

"Pull in your ears, Buck Malone. Who

in —— wants you? If we did, we'd have got you long ago."

"Yeah. Like ——!"

I didn't like him, never had, and he knew it. We stood there sizing each other up. Rum fumes drifted to me.

"Turned nigger, huh?" I grunted. "Got a charcoal wife? And showing *cacos* how to ambush your old shipmates!"

"Yuh're a liar, Carney! I ain't turned nigger an' I ain't got no native wife an' I ain't doin' no ambushin'! An' if yuh make any more cracks like that I'll chuck this gun away an' beat your face in!"

"You tried that once," I reminded him.

"Yeah, but this time I'm mad and desperate!"

His voice wasn't quite so gritty, even if he was mad, and he was sort of slumping like he was tired. He grounded his rifle—it was a service Springfield, I saw—and I could have got him easy, had I wanted.

"Carney," he said, now sort of pleading, "why don't yuh give a guy a chance? I don't mind much what a first-cruise boot thinks about me, but a guy like you. Yuh got me wrong, old-timer. I ain't turned native. Listen. They was gonna send me back to the States, an' I had trouble there once, see? Yuh know, bad trouble. I—I pulled a job once an' the bulls are still lookin' for me, yuh know."

"Oh!" I nodded. So a jail sentence was awaiting him in the States! I got him now.

"I always been sorry about what I done back there, but it was done, an' what could I do? I ain't never done anything like it since; all I got kicked outa th' marines for was gettin' drunk an' fightin' an' breakin' liberty an' insubordination an' things like that. Ain't that right? I ask yuh, what could I do? I didn't have money to get away with so I hadda hide out in th' hills with th' *cacos*.

"I gotta get away soon, though," he went on after a pause, " 'cause I ain't standin' in so good with th' niggers. They think I been sendin' out word to *les blancs* when to look for a raid."

"Have you?"

"I ain't sayin' nothin' about that." He looked behind him and listened with his head cocked on one side, and then said, "Gimme a chance, Carney. I ain't a bad guy."

"Malone, you're a louse! You're the rottenest marine I ever saw. But I don't care what you are or what happens to you. I'm here to get a guy named Snedden."

He dropped his rifle and didn't pick it up.

"Snedden! Snedden? Is Dick Snedden here in Haiti?"

"He's here." And I told Malone about my meeting the poor office worm who thought he was a bold adventurer. "He came to help his buddy."

"Yeah, him an' me was buddies in France. He's all right, too, even if he ain't a rough, tough egg like you an' me. We got along good, him an' me, goin' aroun' together. Aw, yuh needn't grin sarcastic like that, Carney! Sure he had th' money most of the time, but what of it? Wasn't we buddies? An' didn't he get his Congressional Medal th' same time I got mine?"

"You got yours?" My mouth fell open. Malone had come to our outfit after the war, and had never told us he had a Congressional Medal.

"Let it go, Carney. Forget it. It slipped out. Say, we gotta get Dick Snedden back to town. I didn't want him to come into th' interior. Thought to meet him in town."

He thought a few seconds.

"Don't know what it is, but the niggers're gatherin' for somethin' tonight. An' if I don't get back to th' temple pretty soon they'll get suspicious an' come lookin' for me. I'll go back an' stall 'em off while you go head off Dick Snedden, huh? How 'bout it?"

"Huh-huh."

"Make him go back with yuh, Carney. Yuh know, yuh won't believe it, Carney, but I think a lot o' that little—"

"Go on! Get back to your niggers!" I cut in.

A marine is a leatherneck or he's only a marine. Malone, in my opinion, wasn't

even a marine. I didn't like him and wanted him to know it. He grunted something, picked up his rifle and disappeared in the darkness. I started toward La Miel.

Tonk-tonk-tonk-tonk-tonk! On and on and on, like the pulse of some jungle god. I was as jumpy now as a scared cat.

Malone was right. Something was in the wind; trouble was making up. I wondered.

I ALMOST walked right into that man before I saw him. I dropped flat and, with my rifle hugged close to my body, rolled into the shallow ditch at the right of the road.

He was an old man, a black—frail and bent and spindly. He stood in the center of the road, his head back and his hands clawing the air above his head. He was muttering words.

His voice rose louder and louder but, though I understood creole pretty well, he spilled words so fast that I made out one only here and there. He seemed to be exhorting his deity, the Green Python, to aid the *defenseurs de la patrie* in something or other. This old gook, I knew then, was a Vaudoux *papa-loi*, or priest.

So near at hand that it startled me, a tom-tom came suddenly to life. The *papa-loi* slipped like a black ghost into the thick growth at the left of the road.

I lay there for awhile afraid to move. The tom-tom seemed to be changing its position, though no white man can tell the direction of a Vaudoux drum. The sound fell slowly to a sleepy undertone, and above it sounded a voice, a shrill voice with the nerve-wrenching note of a buzz-saw striking a nail. Deep in the jungle a glow sprang up as from a fire.

I got to my hands and knees and scuttled like a rabbit across the road. I ducked into the brush and wriggled forward, using the fire as a beacon. A half-hour of hot, hard work and I came upon them.

Before me was a Vaudoux temple—merely a circular cleared space among the trees. In the temple was a band of *cacos*, men and women, squatting shoulder to shoulder in a circle. Within the circle of *cacos*, at one side, squatted a woman in a white skirt and a flaming red blouse, a *maman-loi*, or priestess, her withered old arms hugging her pipestem legs. Near her lay a small white goat, bleating and struggling against the thongs that bound its feet.

In the very center of the circle was the old Vaudoux doctor, his head thrown back, his little eyes like red coals, his mouth foam-flecked. He was flinging out wild, jumbled words in a steady stream, and some of what he was saying I understood.

All over Haiti the *defenseurs de la patrie* were rising; from the Pagno border to the gulf, from coast to coast, they were flying to arms, and this little band must join the great army that was to be the good General Charlemagne's. The whites were planning to organize again the *corvée*, and free Haitians would be dragged from their homes to labor on the roads. Their families would suffer *le grand gout*—great hunger. The whites would persecute them without end. Tyranny—

I put disconnected phrases together and got the meaning of it all. All black Haiti was rising; arms were being brought over the Dominican border; all *caco* chiefs were assembling with their bands—millions of men, said the priest; white oppression would be wiped out again, as in the past the Spanish, French and English armies had been defeated and driven out. Haiti would be a free country— *Liberté, égalité, fraternité!*

It looked bad. Should these half-crazy gooks get the jump on the Occupation, they could shed a lot of blood before they could be checked and driven back to the hills.

I took note of their arms. They had high-powered modern rifles and ancient muzzle-loaders of large bore, revolvers and pistols of all makes and ages, French rapiers and cavalry sabers, *machetes*, axes and *cocomacaques*—coco-palm clubs.

The men themselves were grim, smoldering-eyed fellows, born outlaws, savage

hill fighters. There was a vast difference btween these men and the meek, down-trodden gooks of the towns. The original Congo strain was stronger here, and they had proved time and again, against the Spanish, the French and the English, that they were not to be despised as opponents. And as victors they were merciless.

This surprize uprising, I decided, must be nipped in the bud before it gained too great momentum. Word must be sent to Port-au-Prince, to St. Nicholas, to La Cap, to every marine and gendarme outpost in the Republic. And it must be done quickly.

I squirmed backward. Slowly I got to my feet. I heard a slight rustle behind me and swung about. Something crashed against my head. A great ball of sizzling fire burst before my eyes. The ball receded, got smaller and smaller, till it was no more than a red pinpoint swaying in the distance. It blinked out, and blackness dropped down upon me.

WHEN I came to I was lying, bound hand and foot and gagged with palm fiber, upon a flat stone within the circle of *cacos*. Near me squatted a one-eyed tom-tom player, his cone-shaped hollow-log drum between his knees, sleepily beating out a soft, weird cadence with his knuckles and the heels of his hands. The sound close up was so low as to be hardly more than a murmur, yet it could be heard miles away. The blacks circling me were swaying with an air of suppressed excitement.

The old *papa-loi* was speaking, his face a shriveled mask of hatred. A hornless goat, he said, had been sent to them; Vaudoux had sent it as a test. To hold the Green Python's favor they must return the hornless goat as an offering. Then, success would be certain. The children of the Python would be rendered immune to the bullets of *les blancs* and they would drive all foreigners into the sea. It was written.

A low wail of assent arose from the circle. The *maman-loi* leaped to her feet and whirled around in a wild, mad dance, her skinny arms and legs twisting and swinging as if boneless, like lengths of black rubber hose.

When you're a husky, healthy sort of fellow and have been thinking all the time that you have a lot of good years ahead of you, it's not pleasant suddenly to meet death face to face, especially not if you're trussed so you can't put up any kind of a battle. Here I had been thinking all these years that death was something that happened only to other people, and here it was about to happen to me. Not so good.

And all, I groaned, because I was a fool, because I hadn't sense enough to sit tight and let that monkey Snedden, that one-adventure simp, go about his business of getting his throat cut. A little reasoning should have told me that Snedden, being a fool, would have fool's luck. He would probably wander through Haiti for weeks without meeting a *caco* or getting a scratch. And here I was where he ought to be, trussed up and waiting for the slaughter. The hornless goat—that was I. Brainless, also.

I was soaking wet with cold sweat. It dripped from my wrist bones, my ears; ran down my cheeks and into the corners of my mouth. My heart was thumping like a battleship's propeller. I shook my head to clear my eyes.

A giant black rose from the swaying circle. One side of him was normal, but the other showed the effects of the terrible national disease, elephantiasis. The ear was soft and flabby and the size of a large coconut, and it swung limply and slapped his shoulder as he moved, like a piece of swollen liver; the arm to the wrist was also soft and flabby and as big around as his thigh, tapering to a small and twisted hand; the foot was the size of a ham and he dragged it as he hobbled forward.

He held out a long, lean knife and waited with bowed head, his ghastly ear dangling against his cheek. The *maman-loi* snatched the knife and spun toward me, a terrible eagerness in her eyes.

I struggled, but the palm thongs that bound me were like leather. I tried frantically to roll from the slab, but two big gooks gripped me and held me flat. The *maman-loi*, smiling horribly, tried the edge of the blade on the tip of her tongue, her deep-set little eyes twinkling at me above the shining point. The *papa-loi*, trembling with blood lust and fanaticism, flung out a jumble of words and moved closer, the better to see.

The priestess nodded satisfaction with the knife's edge. She snatched up a handful of dry dust from the ground and with a quick flirt made some sort of a symbol on my chest.

"*Halte!*"

My heart leaped at that booming voice. The *maman-loi* swung about. There was a short scuffle and a blocky figure broke through the circle.

It was Buck Malone. He carried no rifle, but there was a big Navy-type .45 at his hip. He was laughing.

He made straight for me. A gook blocked his way but he sent the black spinning with a careless smash to the jaw.

In spite of the state of mind I was in, I felt a thrill of admiration for the man. He was staking all upon his insolent contempt of them, relying upon his careless scorn to overawe them. He pushed through to my side, the reek of *taffia* preceding him.

"Outa th' way, yuh scum! *Vamose! Allez!* Beat it, yuh bums! *Pas bon bagaille*, no —— good, all of yuh! Lick th' whites? You iron-skulled baboons? Haw-haw! Get me mad an' I'll lick th' whole lousy gang o' yuh by myself! Two leathernecks an' a gob could lick th' whole *caco* army! Outa th' way, lizard-face!" The last phrase to the *papa-loi*.

But the old priest was not to be swept off his feet so easily as the rest. He moved aside, but I saw his eyes glint wickedly as Malone turned his back and bent over me with an open pocketknife in his hand.

Behind him the *papa-loi* was lifting a long, heavy *machete*. I made gurgling sounds through my gag, tried to warn Malone with my eyes. But he only laughed as he slashed the thongs that bound my wrists. Without looking up he moved down to my ankles, while I tore at the fiber at my mouth.

The *papa-loi's machete* swung back, hovered there, started forward—

Wham!

The old *papa-loi* was jolted forward as if struck with a club. He fell headlong and rolled into the fire. The *maman-loi* screamed and clawed at him.

BEYOND the circle, his white, round face standing out against the blackness of the jungle, stood funny, fat Snedden, a smoking Springfield in his hands.

"I'm covering you, Buck!" he cried.

I was free now. Buck Malone yanked me to my feet and thrust an automatic in my hand. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a *caco* bring a double-barreled shotgun to bear on me and saw him pitch forward as Snedden calmly picked him off from the fringe of the woods.

"This way, Barney!"

"Coming, Schnitzlebaum!" I answered and swung my left fist against the lop-sided giant's flappy ear. It was like striking a hot-water bottle. He screamed; blood spurted; he wrapped both arms about his head and sank to the ground.

A bullet burned my cheek and a knife ripped my coat down the front; then, I threw three slugs from my automatic into the black mass milling toward me and it broke apart and left an opening. Malone's Navy revolver roared at my side and I heard him laugh.

"Gangway for a coupla leathernecks!"

We both fired into them again as we hurtled through; then we reached Snedden and the three of us plunged into the thick growth. Guns cracked behind us and slugs went zipping through the trees and brush.

Soon we knew we had lost them and we slowed up. Malone, who knew this section better than I, took the lead and we followed close at his heels. We loaded our weapons as we went. When we reached the main road we turned into it.

"Say," said Snedden suddenly, swinging to me, "my name isn't Schnitzlebaum—it's Snedden."

"Huh-huh." These two had me on the ropes. A half-drunk kick-out and a lily-fingered ink-slinger. I couldn't figure them.

"I met Dick," explained Malone, "and then we heard your shot. I sent a nigger *bon habitant* to the La Miel gendarme post with word of the uprising."

"Huh-huh." I was still in a daze. I'm a hard loser, I guess, and I hated to give in.

"What're you two going to do now?" I asked.

"We're leaving Haiti," answered Snedden. "We're going to buy a forty or fifty-foot sloop and sail her around the tropics for a couple of years till we get tired of it. We'll go where we want and when."

"Leave Haiti? How?" I asked, looking at Malone.

"Yeah, that's right," he grunted. "Yeah."

Right then I made myself liable to a prison sentence for assisting a deserter, for Malone's dishonorable discharge had not been delivered to him and he was technically a deserter.

"Malone," I said, "you go to Yo Lung, that Chinese export man down near the Mole in St. Nicholas, and tell him you're a friend of mine. He'll show you how to get out of Haiti. He's a square old chink and you can trust him."

"Well, now—say, that's all right, Carney!"

He put out his hand, then drew it back quickly and thrust it into his pocket.

We reached my horse, still tethered where I left it, and stopped. I stood with my arm over the saddle. Malone lingered. He seemed embarrassed about something. I, too, was embarrassed, but I had something to say and was man enough to say it.

"You two did me a good turn, back there, and—"

"Forget it!" growled Malone, and Snedden chimed in.

"Say, Carney," Malone suddenly blurted out, "maybe when yuh get back to the outfit yuh'll kinda pass th' word aroun' that I ain't no renegade or didn't go native or—an' all that, huh? I know yuh don't think much o' me, but—but maybe yuh won't mind telling the gang I ain't got nothin' against th' outfit."

"I'll tell them the truth about you. The colonel, too—I'll tell him myself."

"Will yuh?" His voice was husky. He slapped little Snedden soundly upon the back. "Hear that, Dickie?"

He turned back to me.

"Well, so long, Carney. You an' me ain't never been what yuh'd call friends, but yuh're one swell guy, anyhow. So long, old-timer."

He started off, but I gripped his hand and shook it. I then shook hands with Snedden, and the two went slowly down the road. Just before the shadows blotted them out they turned and Malone's big voice came rumbling back to me—

"So long, old-timer!"

"So long! So long, leatherneck!" I answered.

Then came Snedden's voice—

"So long, Barney!"

"So long, Schnitzlebaum!"

"Hey, I told you my name's not Schnitzle—"

"Pipe down!" from Malone. "He's kiddin' yuh, Dickie, an' when he does that it means he likes yuh!"

Then they were gone, those buddies—those medal men.

Hangtown

BY JOHN L. CONSIDINE

PLACERVILLE, California, the county-seat of El Dorado County, for a long time was known by the disagreeable name of "Hangtown." It took four hangings to clamp the nickname on the place. The first was the outcome of a winning at the Round Tent.

Almost every flourishing mining camp of pioneer California had its Round Tent —a gambling resort usually located in the heart of the town. The Placerville Round Tent was devoted to that game of speedy action, monte. A habitué won a big sum there. Three Latin Americans coveted his winnings and robbed him. They thought it safe to do so, assuming that the American residents would take no interest in the robbery of one who was, like themselves, a Latin American.

He was a stout fellow with strong lungs and he made such an uproar that hundreds came running to the spot. The thieves were caught, tried and sentenced to hang. There was little delay in putting the sentence into effect. A tree was used as a gallows.

The fourth victim of the tree was known as "Young Richard." He came to "Dry Diggings," as Placerville was first called, to try his luck at monte. Plucky, skillful and nimble-fingered, he gave every promise of a successful career. But he, too, became the victim of a mistake. He had a falling out with a pal and against that pal he nursed a grudge. One night, under the influence of liquor in the El Dorado saloon, he had the bad luck to mistake an emigrant—Placerville was then on the overland trail—for his pal, and to stab and kill him.

Tried, hurried to the fatal oak, the noose thrown about young Richard's neck, his courage never left him. Even when the sheriff, Bill Rodgers, and the two constables, Alex Hunter and John Clark, tried to rescue him, he remained absolutely cool and showed no unmannerly eagerness. The only privilege he asked was that he be permitted to climb the tree and jump from the limb.

"This privilege was denied," says an unsympathetic chronicler, "and he was swung into eternity by strong and willing hands."

These occurrences were what gave Dry Diggings the name of Hangtown. As an offset, possibly, the inhabitants officially proclaimed the name of their community to be Placerville. They were not unduly sensitive, however, and probably regarded the fact that desperadoes shunned the place as more than a compensation for the ugly nickname. In fact, some of the residents took a sort of pride in the nickname and its properties. When it was decided to cut down the oak at the corner of Main and Colusa Streets, to make room for a theater, Joe Fisher was so moved that he broke into song:

"Herrick, spare that tree!
Let not its branches fall.
Here let it always be
A warning to us all.

"For it was in forty-nine,
When our good town yet was young,
Three men for murder vile
Upon that tree were hung.

"Yes, on this same old tree
These miscreants met their doom;
Keep it for all to see
As a grave-tree o'er their tomb.

"This tree let always stand,
For 'tis of great renown;
Then, Herrick, stay thy hand—
Spare this relic of our town!"

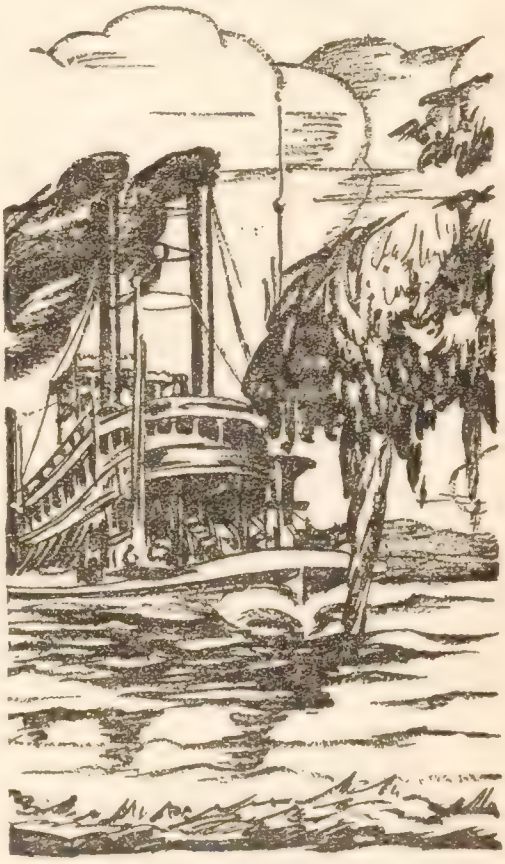
Herrick seems to have been a crass and brutal clod, devoid of fine sentiment and civic pride for, despite this moving effusion, he cut down the tree.

Beginning a Novel of the Glamourous

OLD FATHER

By

ALAN LEMAY



IN A NIGHT that seemed utterly without light the deep, ghostly blanket of the fog held a faint pearly color of its own, as soft as gray chiffon; beautiful in its dim mystery, but deathly treacherous, its limitless depths masking the unknown. Its cold wraith-fingers wet the faces of the rivermen and held close to the water the faint smell of clay awash, and wet leaves. Under it the ancient river slid silently, smooth as black glass, its four-mile current majestic, perpetual, unhurried.

The watchman at Fairchild's Landing heard the invisible steamboat *Peter Swain* go past, down-river bound. Through the fog, with incongruous clarity, there drifted to him the steady churr of her paddle-wheel and the soft panting of her steam. The chanting cries of her leadsmen, feeling her way, came unimpeded across the hidden water:

"Ma-ark three— Quarter less three— Ma-ark three—"

On the *Peter Swain* every gleam of light had been smothered. Even the red breath of the fire-doors was masked by canvas screens, to give the eyes of the fog-blinded pilot every chance. Peering through the grayness, the watchman thought he could glimpse for a moment the red and green pinpoints of her running lights, high on her towering smoke stacks; but that was all.

The watchman leaned back among his cratings, his eyes still turned sightlessly downstream after the receding boat. It was beyond midnight; he dozed; the long minutes passed.

Far down the river there appeared a faint glow in the fog, tiny at first, like a lantern smudged by the mist; then growing a little, as if a plucked-out bit of fog-cotton had turned to golden light. Over the water came a small murmur of raised voices, a stamping of feet; then the hoarse, deep voice of the boat whistling a long, two shorts and a long—the signal for a landing where no landing was.

"Gaw'!" The old man ran stumbling

Steamboating Days on the Mississippi

OF WATERS

up the path. His shouts rose shrilly, frightening the birds of the night. "Hank! Eben! Fire on the river! Steamboat burnin'! Hank— Git up! Eben, run— run to the town!"

Panting, almost hysterical with excitement, the watchman ran on to spread an alarm that was half an appeal for swift aid, half a summons to a great tragic show.

IN HIS bunk on the *Peter Swain* Captain Arnold Huston sat up suddenly from a light and restless sleep and stared into the dark. From the main deck, close down by the water, came a confused babble of exclamations, followed by loud voices, excited cries, the scuffling of feet.

Through the dark he could see only the gray square of his window, a dim page of nothingness, framed in utter black. He rolled to his feet, and his hands gripped the clammy sill as he tried to discover some sign on the fog-hidden water below. To his nostrils came the drenched river odor, and the smell of water-touched paint; but for all his eyes could make out

there might have existed nothing in the world but the swathing gray vapor, the frame of his window and the rising, clamoring voices below.

A thin little whistle blew suddenly at his elbow. It was the speaking tube from the pilot house.

"Yeah?"

"Fire in the deck-room," said the small voice of the tube. "I just got it from below." The voice stopped, then Huston heard it again, faint this time, as the pilot spoke through another tube to the engineer. "Stand by, Dick—I can't step down on her fer a second. Git ready to tear the heart out of her, Dick—"

Then a small mutter of something from the engine-room, coming to Captain Huston by way of the pilot-house through the tubes. It was odd how, in this moment of clamor and disaster, those whispers could run over the boat, slipping alike through noise and bulkheads and decks.

A chill like an ice-block settling in Huston's stomach made him rigid. The boat beneath his feet represented everything he owned. More, it supplied almost the whole meaning of his life. It was the old story of river fire, old as the first boat, yet as perpetually new as death, the wastage of a floating village, the destruction of man-built hopes. A belated load of cotton in the open deck-room below, tinder dust of cargo-ground wood, perhaps a spark from a pineknot brazier at the last landing, careless negroes—these things had turned the trick again.

Another steamboat, Arnold Huston's this time, was hesitating on the brink of a destruction incongruously swift and certain. No stovelaid fire of dry pine was better adapted to go up in a great rush of flame than the flimsy superstructure of those white river-plying boats. Steamboats that caught fire were lost, in those days before the war of the States.

Bells jangled in the engine room, signaling full speed ahead. Huston felt the answering tremble of the whole boat to the surging thrust of the steam. Her engines heaved mightily with great slow sighs like overburdened giants laboring to gain way, fighting to get her nose against the unseen shore before she gave herself utterly to the flames and smoke.

The ice in Huston's body left him quivering with helpless wrath. He had been sleeping naked under his sheet, an old habit of his; now he jerked on his trousers and kicked his feet into his shoes. The engine-room bells jabbered again, hysterically, to the yank of the pilot's cord:

"Give 'er hell! Give 'er hell!"

The dry reek of fire subtly penetrated the smell of the mist. Huston burst out of his stateroom in the Texas-house, ran down the stairs from the hurricane roof and along the boiler deck-guards to the cabin entrance.

A pair of black cabin boys, their eyes white and starting, came tumbling into him at the door. It would have been comical, this terror of theirs, had its cause been less real; but no one knew better than the river negroes how quickly the serene white boat could turn to an inferno of shriveling heat.

Huston blocked the way. As the negroes gathered themselves to rush past him, he would have smashed out at their black faces with his fists. But they stopped and cowered in front of him, their eyes rolling as if for other means of escape. Already the deck was growing hot under their bare feet. A great purl of dry smoke bellied up from below and rolled over them, past the cabin windows.

He must have been a terrible figure to them in that moment, this half-naked white man, to hold them so. Below, the turmoil had subsided as suddenly as it had begun, but they heard the crack of black-snake whips and the smothered, gasping yell of a fireman against an impersonal silence more terrible than the clamor of fear. The chill mist that bounded their world took on a pale efflorescence of light.

"Wake the passengers!"

Huston's lips were thin, and drew away easily from his strong teeth when he

laughed; he seemed to be laughing now, but savagely, green-eyed and demoniac. The negroes stumbled away from him, toward the long lamplit passage between the rows of stateroom doors.

The thin captain disappeared from the entrance, and for a moment flattened himself against the bulkhead beside it. One of the slaves made a break for the smoky outer air, and Huston, swinging with all his strength, smashed the black's face with his fist. Huston wore a shoulder-holstered gun which he would have used without hesitation, but the man went reeling and staggering back. And after that they did their work, pounding on the white paneled doors with frantic palms.

"Git up, massa, git up! Git up! 'E bu'nin'—'e bu'nin' fo' sho'!"

Below, on the main deck, the cotton was already wrapped in blue sheaths of flame. There was no fighting the fire: there were no facilities to fight it. Against the weaving blaze in the open deck-room the stanchions stood black. The fire lighted brilliantly the lower deck, showed the ripples of the oily black water slipping along just below the chocks of the guards; and beyond, the everlasting fog, intangible, black, folding them in from the outside world.

Forward on the forecastle, in the tilted deck-space between the bows, half a hundred slaves were herded against the circular sweep of the chocks, staring-eyed, silent, huddling as far as they could from the increasing heat. They cowered, their jungle spirits terrorized by the black depths of the river, the ghostly fog and the merciless fire demon that pressed them against unknown deaths. There were a score of slave women and pickaninnies there; and of the thirty or forty brute-muscled roustabouts less than half could swim.

Huston's mate, a man with bowed, powerful shoulders, had fought his way among them, seeking his leadsmen; and now the sounding calls rose again in despairing wails:

"Quarter twain! Quarter twain!"

The captain raced aft along the deserted guards through heat that crisped his naked shoulders as he ran; to the fireroom, where the steaming blacks should be stoking the boilers. The firemen on Numbers Five and Six were gone from the narrow fire alley; but the other four were working frantically, the sheen of their sweat outlining them in burning red from the fire-doors.

The second mate was already there, a little wizened man with whiskers like smoked cotton; his trousers and shirt shone white against the wood-pile on which he stood. His limber whip ran here and there among the firemen like a snake, its slithering threat spurring them to their work.

A weird shape scraped along the lip of the chocks. Huston recognized the great crooked finger of a snag that thrust four feet above the surface, a hazard that had groped for the steamboat's last moments of life and missed. By this remembered sign he knew that they were half a mile from shore, a long half mile, a half mile that they would hardly make.

The last of the passengers were tumbling down the stairway as Huston regained the forward deck. They mingled with the fear-crazed negroes, clinging together in little groups, white-faced, half clad. There were only eleven of them this trip, thank God! A baby was crying pitifully; some darkies were singing some wild, outlandish hymn:

"Come *now*, Marse Jedus, come now, come soon. Oh Marse Jedus, come soon!"

Two foolish lines, over and over, with the ghastly sincerity of the fear of death.

Stronger than these minor things, stronger than the low mutter of the boat herself, spoke the ugly, flapping crackle of the flames, not loud but softly inescapable, reducing all other sounds to a background of silence. The heavy smoke billowed forward, blinding them; with it came the strangling cotton gas, so torturing that it seemed drawing their lungs out through their throats. When the smoke turned away it revealed the

huddled group stricken. A third of the people were down, yet in the respite from the smoke there sounded again, diminished, the wild swing of that primitive hymn.

The people were crushed together now along the curve of the forward chocks, drawing away from the reaching heat of the blaze. A mad scream, instantly checked by the closing water, was heard as some one was jammed overboard and disappeared under the great heat.

"Ma-ark twain! Mark twain!"

Twelve feet of water. More than a quarter mile to go—

A section of the boiler-deck fell into the blaze, letting the flames pour roaring upward into the cabin itself. The intense heat on the forecastle just above the water became intolerable, scorching. A stanchion twelve feet from the nearest fire burst into flame. Pickaninnies hid their faces in their mothers' skirts; the little ones screamed and pleaded. The mass of the darkies crouched jibbering and praying in the smoke.

"Quarter less twain!"—a tortured cry of despair.

Huston set his teeth, his hands were at his sides in trembling claws. There was a bar to be passed just here. Already the broad hull seemed to hang back against the thrashing paddlewheel, as if the steamboat felt the reef ahead.

"Come *now*, Marse Jedus—"

"Eight feet! Seven!" Then, after a long age, filled with the hungry roar of the flame, "Mark one!" One fathom, six feet! She couldn't make it, she couldn't—By God, she did!

A great roar of cheering voices went up in the fog ahead, and red, streaming eyes turned wonderingly toward the unseen shore. She was in free water again. Only a furlong now, only a furlong more. The flames rippled over the light woodwork of the cabin. They had made a flue through the hurricane roof. A great shower of golden sparks flung upward against that vast silent ghost of fog. Half a furlong more. The pilot-house must go soon. It was certain that the pilot at the great wheel would die there, now.

The mate was marshaling his negroes to throw out the stage plank, shouting savagely, his whistling black-snake biting deep wherever it fell. A yellow bank loomed over them. Suddenly the boat nosed into the wet clay with a great laboring groan and a swift sickening check of speed. The *Peter Swain* disgorged her human life.

II

ARNOLD HUSTON was a man toward whom violence naturally gravitated. He seemed marked as a center of storm, as if born under turbulent stars.

At twenty-seven he was slender as a stanchion, bony, and of no more than ordinary height. His thin lips drew away easily from his teeth, as easily as the chuckling, free-running laughter welled out of his throat, for he laughed both readily and well. The creases that result from much grinning already carved his lean cheeks; but in repose his face was harsh, giving the illusion that vicissitudes, not humor, had carved those bracketing lines about his mouth. Above his forehead stood a stiff, often tangled roach of tawny hair.

On the river he was not widely known. At a time when owners of great lines numbering scores of ships were struggling for mastery of the Mississippi trade, a single personality, however individual, made little mark.

At that time—the year 1858, three years before the civil conflict—the river trade was not only at the flood tide of power, but seemed only in the infancy of that power. Great white packets, ever greater, faster, more luxurious, were being launched by the score. Million upon million was invested in the fragily towering craft, at a time when a million represented untold wealth. And still the full-bodied river trade, growing lustily, was calling for more. No boat lacked a cargo, none its quota of passengers. The Mississippi seemed to be coming swiftly into

its own as the very heart stream of the nation's trade.

St. Louis, Cairo, Memphis, Vicksburg, Natchez, Baton Rouge—above all, New Orleans, the gateway to the sea—teemed with rivermen of every rank, from the lowly raftsman and the vanishing flatboatmen to the affluent owner and the long pilot, to whom all looked with respect as the man without whom no keel could move.

Hard-shelled slave-traders brushed shoulders with the strolling, light-fingered gentry of the card packs—professional gamblers whose harvests were never lean. Wealthy planters, gentlemen bred and born, rode the river unaffected by its restless tone; too constantly immured, perhaps, in the plantation atmosphere of their own making to be susceptible to the seethe and drag of trade. Rough back-country men of the Louisiana bayous, Texas cattlemen, traveling salesmen from the North, men wanted by the law—all appeared on the river; all contributed something to the fiber of its life.

Men of ambition held their ears to the ground; the river's future, immediate and ultimate, was perpetually first in the minds of its lords. Jealously each watched the growth of competing lines, the most recent departures in speed, the newest standards of elegance in cabin accommodations. Rumors of late achievements and bold projected plans ran up and down the great stream, almost outracing the fast packets themselves.

Nor were men lacking to look farther, to feel the pulse of foreign trade, shrewdly calculating its relationship to the trade of the Mississippi, alert for means to extend river power overseas. Their eyes, too, turned constantly to the North, where were rumbling with increasing menace the first thunders of the storm that was to destroy the old South, and with it the life of the river itself.

For the river trade had its roots in the soil of the Southern bottomlands. Advancing to the river's very margin, closely enfolding the hell-roaring steamboat towns, lay the great plantations, leisurely, wealthy, sustaining a life of their own that differed from anything else the world could show. The black soil of the deltas, cheaply worked by herd labor, blossomed into the limitless tonnage of cotton that supplied the globe. It was the plantation that gave the steamboat its mountainous loads of bales, filled its staterooms with the grace of aristocracy, and its cargo decks with sinewy blacks.

"IF YOU are going to hunt turmoil all the time," said Arnold Huston's father, "turmoil is going to begin hunting you."

That was when Arnold was eighteen. At that time he had already been four years on the river.

Turmoil was a common word with old Anastasius Huston, tossed out repeatedly like a poker chip until it was well worn with use. It represented to him the very epitome of the undesirable. He lived in an unpainted house on the outskirts of Natchez, a house that had once been beautiful and grand. He owned some land somewhere, and some rented-out slaves some place else; but until his death Arnold knew neither the extent nor the exact source of his father's income. In his last years Anastasius Huston had the thin-carved cheek that his son had inherited, but his lips were long and full. They seemed to stroke over and mold out the slow words that he spoke.

Anastasius believed that he was of the oldest of the old Southern aristocracy. The discrepancy between this inherited position and the slight attention accorded him made him wonder with an increasing dim bitterness what the world was coming to; and he hid his mortification behind a grim half-smile that looked cynical where cynicism played no part.

But the strength of his forebears did not appear in Anastasius. The rich black mucklands that they had spent their lives to win dribbled away, and their magnificent potentialities passed into other hands.

There was a moldiness about Anastasius in his later years, and the ruined

lineaments of strength behind the mold seemed hollow, as if the man were vacated by all significant things. His son Arnold, born of an Irish mother—what eccentric madness made Anastasius choose her?—found nothing in his father to hold him, nothing at all.

At twelve, three years after his mother's death, Arnold Huston was haunting the river-front; at fourteen he had left home for good. In the next four years the river took him past recall, shaping him into what he was always going to be. Cabin boy, engine-room striker, pilot's cub, second mate at eighteen—by the time that he stood uncomfortably before his father again he was part and parcel of the river roughage that Anastasius Huston so loathed.

"If you are going to hunt turmoil all the time, turmoil is going to begin hunting you."

Well, it seemed to be so. If Anastasius Huston had never accomplished any other thing in his life, he had at least mouthed out one virulent truth.

It was almost their last conversation. If there had been more, if Arnold had sought to know his father better, other curious and hard-carved things might have been dug up. But he was not interested; and when his father died, eight years later, Arnold was left with a memory full of sharp cluttery detail—the odd, ruffled black tie that went with Anastasius to the grave, the agate buttons that had appeared on each succeeding vest, the fatuously systematic manner in which his father had always folded his napkin in a certain way. But the actual shape of his father's mind remained forever hidden. It had been a thing too cloudily passive, as it lurked in its misty silences, to have left any definite impress.

The fortune which Arnold had expected to inherit no longer existed. When five months of liquidation had dragged through, there were no slaves, money or lands; only a small remaining debt, which he promptly paid out of his pocket. He saved, however, the house in Natchez where he had been born, which he had abandoned for the river in his earliest youth.

By that time Arnold Huston had some money of his own. Pilots had then been ruling the river for some time; five hundred dollars a month was no uncommon wage. When he had clapped every obtainable mortgage on to the Natchez home, borrowed what he could and stretched his credit to the cracking point, he found that he was able to consumate the initial ambition of his life. He equipped a small sort of stern-wheeler and plunged headlong into the river trade.

Thus Anastasius Huston in death achieved for his son what in life he would have bitterly deplored. And the last wealth of the Hustons took to the coffee-colored water in a freshly painted veteran of a boat.

THE FOG had cleared; beyond the bright wreckage of the *Peter Swain* the breeze burnished the dark water in slow-winding rings and lines, returning the firelight like water-snakes of molten gold.

For an hour the night had been troubled by the screaming hiss of the *Swain's* escape valve, flung open as the last act of her engineer; and her whistle, fouled by falling wreckage, had bellowed for a time, a long hoarse roar heard for miles up and down the river. But the steam had exhausted itself at last; and with its passing the whistle had subsided into a choking moan and so fallen silent forever.

The *Swain's* superstructure was gone, collapsed sidewise in a welter of fire from which slender timberings still thrust up, flagstaffs crowded with pennons of flame; and though her heaven-soaring blaze had died away, the guts of her still burned like a floating chunk of hell. Somewhere in the horrid crackling of the fire mass was whatever remained of Tom Cole, the *Peter Swain's* pilot. No one had been able to find the boy who was Cole's cub. Probably he was there too, claimed by destruction along with the man he had idolized.

A broad slab of mahogany from the cabin trim, thrown into the water by some freak of the cabin's collapse, floated past in the backwash; on it in great raised letters of gold showed the motto, "In God We Trust."

Over the crowd ashore rolled a great billowing cloud of cotton gas and smoke, herding them roughly back from the edge of the bluff; and Huston, his face and torso grotesquely painted by the singe of heat and soot, stumbled after the rest. A hairy, sweat-drenched arm fell across his burned shoulders, but he was hardly aware of the pain. The mate was walking at his side.

"Our luck," the mate was muttering. "There she goes—rip, snort, and to hell!" The man had owned some small share in the *Peter Swain.* "First and last boat—All over— End of the Huston Line!"

To himself Huston was saying:

"No, no, by God, no! It's only the beginning!"

But he could say nothing aloud; and the wet, corded arm fell away.

III

TWO NIGHTS later, in Natchez.

A cold weight was upon him as he topped the long climb up Natchez bluff. One foot after the other in the dust was a plodding way of motion to him, unlike that of the boats that glided smoothly upstream, or swung downriver on the back of the current, New Orleans bound. He turned and looked back over the bush-fringed switchback road; it hugged the face of the bluff so closely that he could spit to its very foot. Beyond the broad light-trimmed blotch of Natchez-under-the-hill, the Mississippi lay gray in the night, lighter in color than the black woods of its towhead islands, lighter even than the faintly starred sky. Huston never saw it without feeling the strong pull and draw of that current that could drown a horse or a man, swing a great steamboat to break her rudder against the bank or, by Gargantuan caprice, devour a whole farm in a night.

Far up the river, in the broadening bend, a tiny thing like a bright matchbox afloat was a steamboat bound upstream. He could make out the red and green flecks of running lights on her stacks. She might have been going great guns; perhaps her band was ripping off some swinging air and her decks were gay with people. But far off there, seen from the somber Natchez bluff, she seemed as motionless as any other bright fragment, dwarfed to insignificance by the broad waters on which she rode.

The great silver-gray reaches, empty of traffic but for the single boat, flowed undisturbed, desolate, vastly lonesome. Yet the aged river remained to Huston the artery of life itself. On the dusty bluff, where his best strides were a poor poking trudge, he was no better than a rooted thing. It was different on the river, on the hurricane roof of a broad white boat, with the shores sliding past and the churning paddle-wheels putting the waters behind them all night long.

He was trying not to think of the disaster hardly seventy hours gone. The funeral of his pilot had been an inadequate thing, considering the labors the man had performed in his river years, but it was over with. Tonight, Huston reflected, he owed nothing to himself nor to the world. He hung suspended in a silent interim of inactivity, between the achievements that were gone and the reconstruction that must presently begin.

The oiled bandages beneath his shirt pulled at his scorched skin, hard to forget. Now, if ever, he needed something to blot the past, push the future a little farther away. Below, Natchez-under-the-hill was diverting a thousand others; it could not divert him. Steamboat men, raftsmen, flatboatmen, knockabouts, loafers, wharf rats, river wreckage—they all found their places there, drinking, brawling, gambling, hunting out the red lights. There was nothing for Huston there.

He had wandered through Natchez-under-the-hill, drinking here and there. As he walked, an erect, slim figure, his eyes red in a harsh gray face, swaggering

men had brushed his raw shoulders, jostled him at the bars and in the streets. He could have had a dozen fights for the asking; yet for all his ragged nerves his swift temper had not once risen, and within himself he was apart, and cold. Then presently the close reek of the bars had sickened him, and he had left them, sober still.

A single muscle of his face had tightened with the heady rise of the liquor; it gave his cheek a weary feel. Also there was a curious aspect about the lights as he looked down over the moil under the hill, as if they floated obscurely in limpid water. Otherwise he was as cold sober as before, and the liquor had brought him none of the benefit he had craved.

He strolled on along the road at the top of the bluff. Trees stood over him, close and brooding as he walked, their heavy-foliaged masses against the sky making him feel small, and more than ever bound to the dust. The town was different here; on the tree-shaded heights stately houses were set in wooded lawns. Their tall pillars gleamed austerely, cool in the faint starlight. Planters had their town houses here, and retired rich men—those who controlled the river and those who owned the most successful of the gambling dives and bars. The brawling wave of the river roughage broke at the foot of the bluff, permitting the pillared dwellings to gaze out from above, unnoticed and serene.

He told himself that he was wandering aimlessly, that he neither knew where he was going nor cared. But even as he pressed this reassurance through his mind his feet were slowing, as if reluctant to advance in the direction he took. Some sinister sort of fascination pulled him on, preventing him, in his present flotsam mood, from turning aside.

Thus he presently approached the end of the bluff road. He had been walking with averted eyes, but he raised them now; and from a hundred yards away stood staring at the great ghost of a house that barred the way.

The house at the end of the road was immensely tall, with lean columns pillaring the height of its narrow façade like bars. It had once stood upon a swelling knoll, but the bluff had caved away so that the building overlooked a breath-taking drop on the riverside. Its owners had sold the land before it for city lots to its very lintel, and the right-angled road under the door had been graded down until a ten-foot wall was necessary to sustain the earth that thinly protected the foundations of the house from the street.

The effect of these workings of time was ghostly in the extreme, accentuating the building's already narrow height, leaving it singularly desolate and suggestive of vanished things. It loomed monstrously above the river and the town; and its flat-hipped roof, as if its builders were dissatisfied with the great height it already possessed, supported a thin pillar of a watch tower, empty and dark, and showing the sky through the glass that paneled its six sides.

The tall parallel columns gleamed pallidly, lighter than the silver-gray river and the sky. No light showed within; the façade seemed the death-mask of a house long dead, mournfully sinister in the slight glow of the stars.

It was the early established home of Dennison Huston, the brother of Arnold's father. For twenty-nine years, a period of enmity terminated only by the death of the latter, the brothers had not spoken. Each had watched the other's fortunes with hatred that could have been founded on nothing less real than a significant wrong. Though the younger was now dead, the brotherly hatred lived on, one-sided and without means of expression, but implacable still.

Somewhere within that ghostly tower of a house was the study where Dennison Huston worked, a many-doored inner room lighted by lamps even on the brightest days. Through the years that Anastasius Huston sat alone with his vest buttons, twiddling his thumbs and silently reproaching his waning stars, a constant stream of visitors had made their way to

the tall house on the bluff, always businesslike and always male, for Dennison Huston never entertained.

Lately the visitors were fewer, but individually more important; Dennison Huston had not become a palsied, chair-bound old man without gathering into his hands certain strings, at the ends of which figures danced to the twitch of his age-blotched hands.

Of this man Arnold Huston could obtain nothing, wanted nothing; yet in the contrast between the fortunes of the Dennison Huston branch of the family and his own he found a morbid fascination. He was aware of a new jealousy that repudiated the cool disinterest he had felt toward the uneventful feud as a child. Like Anastasius, Dennison had but one son, Will Huston, two years older than Arnold. To his hands the weapons forged by Dennison Huston were now all but resigned. Will Huston found himself fingering, at his leisure, the handles of such powerful tools as he probably never would have the courage to wield; while Arnold, leaning with sagging frame against a tree, gazed bitterly at the stronghold of Dennison.

There was but one other spot in Natchez that could faintly interest him tonight—the house of his dead father, on that border of Natchez that lay farthest from the river. He started along the brick-paved walks in its direction.

Suddenly he stopped and pivoted on the balls of his feet, arrested by a single brief sound from the mask of the tall house. It had been at once sharp and muffled, like the sound of a heavy fall; Huston knew it for the report of a pistol. For an instant a window rattled in response; then silence again, more desolate, more deathly enigmatic than before.

Huston suppressed a swift impulse to rush up the narrow steps, crash through one of the low-silled windows behind the pillars and learn for himself what weird thing had happened in the inner depths of that inhuman place. But a chilled thoughtfulness came over him, and as suddenly as he had stopped he turned and went away, cat-footed in the darkness under the trees.

DURING the six years prior to the death of Anastasius, Huston had not set eyes on the house in which he had been born. It had held nothing for him in those years, and could offer nothing now; yet he found himself turning toward it, urged by an inner restlessness that called no place friendly, yet sought perpetually for something toward which to move.

Like that of Dennison, the house of his father had been a plantation home, overtaken by the growth of the town. A city street, distinguished from a road only by its brick walk, now ran past its gate. Its lawn, however, remained to it, a rank weed-grown acre darkened by trees that withered with age, yet were able with their interlocked arms to hold out the starlight still.

Huston's steps grew slower as he drew opposite the dwelling in which he had once lived; his feet were silent in the turf beside the walk. He could make out the face of the building now, darkly gray behind the trees. Its checker-paned windows were as black as if cut in coal. Only one or two of the panes, set less squarely in the warping frames than the rest, showed a sad gray gleam, a reflection of the dim sky. Except for these the house was of a piece with the night.

Staring across at it, he almost ran into a group of three or four negroes. They were standing close together, motionless and silent, their gaze so steadily fixed upon the still house that they failed to notice Huston's approach. He was about to brush past them, but paused, swaying on his tired legs, made curious by the fixity of their gaze. He was still feeling the unusual effects of his liquor; and while his sight was abnormally clear he seemed to find an odd aspect in the huddled group of slaves, as if there had been some intangible deformity about them all.

"'E show—'e show!" said one in a husky whisper; "I seen 'e shinin' on the stai'. Jes' you wait—'e show!"

"Ah gwine home!" said another. "Ah

doan' *wanta* see nuffin'. Dis ain't no good place fo' niggahs at night."

"No, man, sho' ain't. Ise heahed the death-rattle comin' out o' that house—"

"Jes' you wait—'e show!"

Huston turned his eyes to the old house, and saw no movement, nothing out of the way; only the broad weathered front, dismal in the dark, of a house that would never see good days again. Then, as he looked, a little square third-floor window made itself visible in the dark, as if behind it the dimmest sort of glow had been lighted. It strengthened until it was a tawny block, only dimly luminous, but so definitely alight that no trick of the eyes could explain it.

"Dar 'e! Dar 'e!" chattered a negro with an aged voice.

"Ah, Lo' Jedus, it's 'em!"

Huston drew in his breath in spite of himself. Then instantly he was angry with himself for the start the light had given him.

"What you talkin' about?" he suddenly demanded of the negroes.

"Ah, Jedus!"

There was a gasp, a scamper of broad bare feet. Huston watched a diminishing silhouette of bobbing heads; then the negroes turned the corner of the street and he was quite alone.

For a moment Huston stood looking strangely at the lighted window in the old house. Then he strode directly across the street and vaulted the rotting picket gate. Beneath the trees the night was utterly black, but his feet were sure enough on the once accustomed ground. From the rank grass and weeds under the trees came a cool, dank breath, as if frogs should be living there, though from no place in the vicinity of the house came voice or sound of a living thing.

From time to time as he approached through the long dark of the trees he could glimpse the light in the high window on the third floor. The tired muscle of his cheek tautened perceptibly; but he shoved his hands into his pockets and advanced steadily.

The steps were close ahead, steps so broad that twelve could have walked up them abreast. There were sixteen of them bridging the blackness under the gallery that crossed the breadth of the house. Above the gallery he could not see, until suddenly he emerged from among the trees, and the house rose before him, sad and old in the faint grayness of the stars.

IV

LIKE the high-pillared home of Dennison Huston, the façade of the aging dwelling looked like a deathly mask; but this one was broad and sunken, instead of whitely tall and austere. And while the mask of the house of Dennison still shielded a place where people lived as they had always lived, this covered only a dusty molder of remains, from which all animate things that had belonged there had gone.

He suddenly stopped and stood motionless; the light in the third story window was gone.

Seeking the unknown in a labyrinth of silent dark was different from merely climbing the stairs to enter a lighted room. He stood uncertainly.

"Some tramp bedded down," he told himself, but was not reassured.

His reluctance to enter the house was replaced by a less negative sensation, a conviction that, unseeing, he was seen. The unrevealing upper windows seemed staring with empty eyes; behind them, he thought, some one was watching who had perceived his approach and destroyed the dim light. Huston's position before the house became intolerable to him. It did not occur to him that he could turn back. He went forward and silently climbed the decaying steps.

Instinct made the light balls of his feet soundless as he crossed the broad gallery to the door. So little did the starlight penetrate the damp gallery that he could not perceive that the door was open until his hand sought its panels and found that they were not there. Unimpeded he stepped into the inner dark.

A thin, cold odor of must and rotting

carpets was in his nostrils. He could see nothing; a glance over his shoulder to the dim starlight he had left made the darkness about him seem the more impenetrable. He stood quiet for a time halfway down the length of the great central hall, listening and trying to accustom his eyes. At first he could hear only the irregular coming and going of his own breath. Then, gradually becoming clear to his straining ears, the thin, steady, scraping sound of a gnawing rat, emphasizing the desolation of the dark, and the long absence of human life.

He moved impatiently, then instantly checked himself again with a swift contraction of the heart. He was certain that something had moved ahead of him, a figure as tall as himself, blacker than the dark behind. For an instant he stood motionless, seeking to disregard the shock that the movement had brought him. Then as suddenly he relaxed, swearing softly; he remembered now the cheval glass that stood at the end of the hall, so placed that he was startled by no deadlier thing than the shadow of himself.

In two strides he verified this solution; and, made suddenly nonchalant by his disgust with himself, he sought the rail of the broad curved stairway that led to the second floor. He found it by memory alone, and went softly up the carpeted treads two at a time, his fingers gathering a soft, moldy accretion of dust as they brushed the rail. On the second floor, beyond the turn of the long stair, he paused to listen once more.

From where he stood not even a window was visible. If it had been dark in the lower hall, it was darker here, without the open door to let in even the reflection of the starlight. Yet he knew where he was as well as if he could have seen.

He had hated that dark upper hall as a child; tonight, as he listened in the moldy dark, he hated it still. It was long and narrow, its high ceiling distant. On either side of it were spaced white doors, some of which he had never seen opened. He had often run past them as a child, imagining them full of phantom shapes. There was not a one of them behind which some one or other had not died; people whom he had neither loved nor known, an assemblage of mysterious old names. Huston had neither credulity nor patience for superstitious belief. Yet tonight the chill of the upper hall seemed thronged with the people of another world, cold and hostile, striving with their ghostly hands to press him down the stairs and away.

A swift chill coursed over his back and shoulders, and the bandaged skin of his back twinged as suddenly as at the touch of fingers. But the silence was complete save for the faint distant gnawing of the rat; and Huston shook himself free of the unseen hands and went on.

The stair to the third floor turned and narrowed, climbing a windowless well. Like the lower stair, it had been carpeted once, but the carpeting was threadbare and thin; his light footfalls were distinct on the treads. He was less careful now, in haste to get the matter over with and return to the outer air.

At the top he once more stood and listened. He could see a dim square of checkered window, its cobwebbed panes admitting no more than enough light to show where it was. But no sound came.

It only remained to examine the room in which he had seen the light. He walked softly to its door, a memory that he had not been aware of showing his feet the way. Again the panels that his groping fingers sought were not where he expected them to be, for the door stood slightly ajar. Without hesitation he pushed it partly open and went in. The hinges emitted a rusty moan, repeated as the released door swung back to its previous position. In the silence the brief metallic sound seemed to scream through the house.

Alone in the room in which he had seen the light, with the door returning behind him, Huston again felt the chill of suppressed cowardice ripple the length of his spine. Then the match that was ready in his fingers blazed sputtering; and

when the blindness of the sudden flare had left his eyes he could see about him for the first time since he had entered the door two floors beneath.

The room was large, low-ceilinged. Although it had been unfurnished ever since he could remember, it had for some reason never been allowed to accumulate the forest of discarded things that filled some of the other third floor rooms. The dust lay thick upon the floor; in the light of the match he could not see whether or not it was disordered.

In a corner stood a packing case and two old trunks. When his match burned out he walked to these in the dark and struck a second match to look behind them. It was a move of ostentatious thoroughness, for he knew as he did it that he would find nothing there.

The chills coursed repeatedly in his back, making his scorched shoulders burn. It seemed to him now that the descent of the long stairs, turning his back upon the mystery that he had sought in this high room, would be infinitely harder than his silent climb into the dark. For some reason he particularly dreaded passing the black hall of the second floor; but the only excuse for delay would have been a more thorough search of the third floor, and this he was more than willing to forego.

He waited a moment, balancing in the dark with his fingers against the wall.

"Slow and steady," he told himself. "Slow and steady. One quick step and it's all off—"

He remembered the story of another riverman who, like himself, had witnessed the burning of his boat with the loss of certain of those aboard; who, also like himself, had gone wandering sleepless in the night and had somehow shut himself into an empty house which he had had no sane reason for entering. And how that man had been taken from the place the next day insanely gibbering.

"Slow and steady—" Huston whispered—"Let's go."

He took a single step forward, then stooped rigid. And as he listened the chills played in great surges in his back, making his muscles crawl. On the stair between the second and third floor he had heard a step. Then another, and a third.

There followed a little pause, and desperately Huston listened. He had even begun to convince himself that the sound had been a fiction of his over-stressed nerves, when it came again. The faint footfalls came up steadily now, though so deliberately that between each and the one that followed there was the suggestion of a pause. So slow were they that they seemed to climb forever, approaching always up such a number of stairs as had never existed there. At last they reached the top, and once more paused.

He could not deceive himself as to what he had heard, for his fingertips on the wall had felt the tremor of weight upon the stairs. The prickle of sweat ran across Huston's forehead. With a great effort he broke his rigidity and fumbled for a match. He drew one out of his pocket with stiff fingers, leaned against the wall and set the head of the match against the plaster. It rattled there with a tiny dull chatter until he pressed it to stillness.

The sound of steps began again, slower now, at once stealthy and deliberately firm. They came steadily to the door of the room in which he waited. They stopped there; and for a long time there was silence.

It seemed to Huston that he could bear the suspense no more. He determined to rush the door, fling it open, assail whatever stood there with fists and hands. Yet when he had decided this he could not bring himself to move. His knees were as brittly inert as ice, and the match-head remained fast to the wall.

Across the room from him the door moved; not steadily as he had moved it before, but slowly, so that its rusty moan was reduced to a series of small ticking complaints. It seemed to him at last that he could see a black blotch that protruded itself into the room, yet he knew that this must be impossible in the thickness of the dark. His eyes had strained

until he could withstand their madness no more; he closed them, and concentrated all his senses in his ears.

There was a step within the room; a long pause—a second—a third. Sound had ceased in the middle of the floor. The time had come for him to strike his match, and still he was unable to move. The moments passed. With a great effort he ripped the match along the plaster and opened his eyes in its instant flare.

Facing him from half across the room, tight-lipped and staring-eyed, stood his cousin, Will Huston.

The man was immaculately groomed; his black cutaway set faultlessly; his curly dark hair was meticulously brushed and pomaded. But Arnold saw only the pallid terror of his cousin's face. His frilled shirt-front and the high collar whose points flared on either side of his jaw were no whiter, it seemed, than Will Huston's mouth.

Arnold laughed harshly.

"Well, you ass?" He had a hard, even voice, slurred by the drawl of the lower river. The match scorched his fingers, and he let it drop.

"Gad, man," said Will in the dark, "what a scare you gave me!"

"You must have been in the house when I came in. Didn't you hear me on that last flight of stairs?"

By the light of a fresh match Arnold could see that the color was returning to the other's cheeks.

"I was on the second floor," Will admitted. "In fact I saw you standing in front of the house before you came in. But—"

"But what?"

"You were reported dead."

"Would I be standin' in front of the house, dead?"

"Gad, you should've seen yourself! You stood there still as a corpse, with a face like a death's-head."

The match died. In the dark Arnold chuckled. It was always difficult for him to realize that he was probably the only one of his family who did not believe, at heart, the superstitions that their negro mammies had instilled in them in their formative years.

"You thought I was dead, and you followed me up here to see what my ghost was after?"

"Something like that," said Will shortly.

"In ——'s name, why?" said Huston, laughing.

"What would you think?" said the other testily. "D'you think I'd go plunging out of the house for *your* ghost?"

"Well," said Arnold, grinning, "you've got more guts than I gave you credit for."

"Can it be possible?" Will returned.

"Let's get out of here."

On the lower gallery they paused, and in the comparative warmth of the outer night they stood for a moment regarding each other awkwardly. They remained aloof, unfriendly as they always had been, linked remotely by a bond of relationship resented by both. Arnold was thinking of the pistol that had spoken in the house of Dennison Huston, but maintained his silence.

Will Huston chose to affect an ironic formality.

"I regret that I failed to receive you at the door."

"Oh, you do?" said Arnold, his annoyance flaming at the other's tone. "Well, I ain't accustomed to being received at my door. To what am I indebted—"

"I am sorry to disillusion you," said Will sarcastically, "but it doesn't happen to be your door."

"I beg your pardon!"

"Why simulate stupidity?" said Will. "Your mortgage is foreclosed."

The formality of his diction was elaborate.

"I got no notice," Arnold declared hotly.

"That was due to no omission of mine."

Arnold, now recollecting clearly enough that the mortgage in question must have expired, saw no reason to doubt his cousin's statement. Knowing the real source of Will Huston's bitter hostility toward him, as he had known also the reason for Dennison Huston's enmity for

his father, Arnold's attitude toward it was ordinarily tolerant. Now, however, his cousin's cool sarcasms whipped him to a consuming blaze of passion.

"Seems like you're even more offensive than usual tonight," he said.

In the faint starlight he could see the pale oval of Will's face, plumply expressionless, with short eyebrows and insolent eyes.

"Still quite the little ruffian," Will murmured.

Lord, thought Arnold, the man might lack brains or sense of humor, but he had the Huston brass! Aloud he said harshly—

"Will you repeat that?"

"I said," returned Will with sudden unnecessary loudness, "still the little ruffian!"

Arnold's fist smashed into his cousin's face. To his surprize the man pitched backward, lit on his back half-way down the gallery steps and rolled to the bottom. Huston was not accustomed to men that fell as easily as that. With his hands on his hips he watched Will slowly gain his feet, perfunctorily dusting his clothes with his hands. He laughed, praying for fresh opportunity.

Will Huston's face was white again as he raised his head. A slender trickle of blood from his mouth traced a crooked line on his smooth chin.

"Of course you'll have to fight for this," he said, his voice quivering with a rage he tried to conceal.

Arnold went down the steps.

"I'm waitin'," he said.

"I suppose a rough-and-tumble brawl would suit you," said Will. "It doesn't suit me."

"No?"

"The choice of weapons is your privilege, but they must be weapons."

Arnold was disgusted by what he took to be a cowardly evasion.

"Oh, jump in the river," he suggested.

"So you're a coward as well as a ruffian, are you?"

"What the —— are you talking about?"

"Pistols, of course."

Arnold was honestly mystified.

"Well," he answered, "I'm sorry I can't shoot you. But I don't carry a gun ashore. If you call on me tomorrow—"

"Tomorrow is impossible. Let me suggest Saturday morning in New Orleans."

"You —— fool," said Arnold, "do you know what year this is?"

"Certainly."

"It's 1858," Arnold told him. "Do you get it? Not thirty-eight, *fifty*-eight. Dueling is as out o' date as knee pants."

"I think not," Will contradicted. "One was fought last week on the Carson plantation, and two the month before at—"

"Oh, rubbish!"

"—Lovell's point. I know that in your class the practise is to hit your enemy when he is not looking for it and then judge the matter closed. I suppose—"

The anger that had sent the hot blood to Arnold's head was ebbing away now, leaving him prey to the weariness of his shattered nerves. He was sickly dizzy, and his raw back and shoulders were surging with fresh flame under the bandages. A roar was in his ears like that of the fire that had taken his boat.

"Oh, all right," he said. "I'll shoot you, if that's what you want."

"Name a second, please."

"Well—Mark Wallace, I guess."

"I'll send my second to him."

Arnold stood, smiling sardonically, while the other went up the steps and locked the door of the old house. Will passed him on the way to the gate without looking back. Arnold watched him as he picked his way meticulously through the weeds, and so disappeared into the dark.

V

THE ROOM in which Huston found Mark Wallace was small, occupying hardly more than a dormer of a house on the Rue Royale in New Orleans. The single checker-paned window, curtainless, looked across the narrow street into the neighboring balconies. Within, the walls

were lined from floor to ceiling with books. Books had entirely taken the place; they were piled among the loose papers on the table, they were in rows and stacks on the floor, they struggled to displace a dusty bust of Rosaro on a mantelpiece that could hardly spare them room.

Huston stood for a little, staring wearily about at the familiar buttresses of books. Mark Wallace was sitting before an empty fireplace hardly larger than a cigar box, and Huston, in an effort to be casual, avoided meeting his eye. Then Wallace sprang up, shook him by the wrists and pressed him into the better of his two chairs.

"How are you feeling, Arn?"

Wallace was nonchalant, and Huston felt himself relax.

"Rotten, thanks."

Wearily he contemplated the familiar features of his friend, who in turn regarded the plaster face of Rosaro through smoke rings provided by his cigar.

The face of Mark Wallace was regular, but distinguished by a delicate sensitiveness, so marked as almost to place him outside of both his surroundings and his time. His slender mustache was well kept, but his hair, dark brown as a seal, was in tousled disarray.

"You know," he said presently, his voice casually modulated, "when I heard the *Peter Swain* had burned I said 'Thank God!' "

"What!"

"I thought that would get to you," Wallace smiled. "You came in here with a face as hard and gray as cement. No ray of light—nothing mattered. But now that I've got your attention, as they say from the soapbox—"

"Tom Cole burned to death with the *Peter Swain*," said Huston harshly. "He stayed with the wheel; deliberately gave his life to land my burning boat. So you sit there and say—"

"I didn't know that, Arn."

"His cub stuck with him," Huston went on, his voice bitter. "He's dead too. Maybe you remember him—a curly-headed youngster of about fourteen who sometimes tagged about with me when he couldn't be with Tom. And you—"

"I didn't know that, either, Arn."

"— you sit there and blow smoke rings and say, 'Thank God!' Good God, any one would think you'd never been outside this room in your life!"

"I didn't mean it that way, Arn."

"Well, what did you mean?"

Mark Wallace opened his lips to reply, but thought better of it. Instead, he dug a pinch-bottle out of a cabinet lost in the books, and poured drinks. Arnold selected a lean cigar from the box offered him.

By settling himself into the cushions with care, Huston found that he could lean back without too much troubling his healing shoulders. His deep draught of wine was mellowing, and the lean cigar was good. They sat silently, contemplating by habit the empty fireplace.

"I've named you as my second in a duel," said Huston at last.

"A duel? Who with?"

"Will Huston—that numskull cousin of mine."

"Oh," said Wallace, relaxing. "He can't shoot. He's never fought before in his life. It won't be serious. Some one fights a duel nearly every month."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"Of course it doesn't get much publicity nowadays, but they do, anyway. This one will be only a waste of time."

"Yes?"

"He'll miss. How many times do I have to—"

"I won't miss," said Arnold flatly.

"Why?"

"Because I can shoot. I can hunt 'possum with my pistol. How can I miss in broad daylight?"

"Point at him; he'll fire and miss. Then you let go into the air."

"No, Mark."

"I tell you Arn, you'll regret it if some one is actually hit."

"If I go out there to shoot a man," said Huston dully, "I aim to shoot him."

Mark Wallace sat bolt upright and his fine eyes rested on Huston with a gleam of humor.

"Oh, all right," he said, relaxing. "Shoot him then! Make everything just as messy as possible. If you can manage to plant the ball in the middle of his face the affair will be especially gratifying. I recommend the bridge of his nose."

"I can hit it, too," said Huston sullenly.

"Oh, lord! Do you know when he wants to fight?"

"Saturday, here. He's challenging, and I want Navy pistols—not an old tiddlywink of a dueling set."

"Won't cannon do?"

"His second will look you up; I don't know who he is."

"Tonight's Thursday, isn't it? Well, will you have whisky or chocolate, before? And where?"

"I'll have coffee here," said Huston.

"Worst thing you could do. 'Captain Huston, crazed with java, calmly emptied his gun in all directions and was forced to brain his opponent with the butt.' "

"Coffee," Huston growled.

"Oh very well— They'll probably hang you, you know, if you insist on hitting him."

"But only once," said Huston.

"Once is commonly fatal."

"I am depending on it."

"I tell you Arn, it's no joking matter!"

"Then why are you joking?"

Wallace gestured impatiently, and fell silent. When Arnold at last looked up he found the other studying him.

"Where are you going, Arn?"

"No place; why?"

"I can tell you where we're going; we're going to a place you've never been before, a place—"

"No place," said Huston shortly.

"—where no one else could possibly take you. It's a privilege, let me tell you. If there is another like it in New Orleans, in the world— Of course, it may appear commonplace to you; people look at things differently. Only, you and I are so much alike—"

"Alike?"

Huston's dark-circled gray eyes observed the other incuriously. Though his life had been untroubled by introspection, he knew himself clearly enough for what he was as he sat there beside Mark Wallace's empty grate—a weather-hardened riverman with a colorless roach of hair above a face now harsh-lined and haggard; a man with corded wrists and cold eyes, skillful only in devices for beating the river game. Little similar, he thought, to this other young man of the books and the town, with his suave hands and sensitive mind, and a face that was close to being beautiful.

"Oh, what are you talking about?"

They smoked for a while in silence before Wallace spoke again.

"Do you feel like sleeping?"

"Good God, no! I haven't slept two hours since the *Swain* burned. When I lie down in the dark I hear the fire, and it like to drives me crazy. I can see it plain—that awful mass of fire, with the body of Tom Cole in it! You should 'a' heard those niggers hollerin', Mark. I never heard anythin' so ghastly in my life. It'd give you somethin' to say 'Thank God' about!".

Mark Wallace said nothing. Presently he rose.

"Come on."

"Where you going?"

"Out."

"I'll sit here, I guess."

"Look here, Arn—do you care a damn about anything tonight?"

"Nothing in the world, Mark."

"Then humor me and come along," he said with an air of conclusion, and opened the door.

Almost reeling with his nerve-wracked fatigue, Huston followed him away.

Wallace led him down the Rue Royale. At Père Antoine's Garden, the little grassy plot behind the St. Louis cathedral, they turned into Orleans alley traversing its tremendous flags they passed between the close-rising walls of the cathedral and the buildings beside it, past the black mouth of le Petit Exchange, past the ironbound door of the Spanish arsenal, where showed the deep grooves that wheels of old cannon had left in the lintel stone, past the massive

Cabildo, until the old Place d'Armes opened before them, its new statue of Jackson lonely in the light of a sinking moon.

It was impossible for Mark Wallace to pass this place by night without imagining that he saw mistily the black moving bulk of the Spanish Guard, the rakish parallel lines of matchlock muskets, the bellying swing of Spanish officers' capes. Huston, observing rather the twin stacks of the huddled steamboats on the levee beyond, saw none of these things; yet saw many things of more immediate interest to the times.

They turned downstream on Chartres, picking their way along the narrow banquette of the narrow street, and paused presently before the arched carriage way of an old house. The building rose sheer from the street, as did all the buildings in the old quarter of New Orleans, jutting upward so vertically that the balconies above made them seem to overhang. Wallace rattled the latch of a lock, so massive that its keyhole could have received his hand, and in answer a little grilled wicket opened in the timbers of the gate.

"Who dah?"

"Wallace."

An entrance more like a window than a door swung inward in the frontlet of the great gate, after much audible fumbling with bolts and bars within. Ducking their heads, they stepped high over the twelve-inch barrier of the sill into a flagged and vaulted passage of proportions designed to receive a coach and six. Beyond the last great arch of the passage the yellow radiance of a coach lantern showed an inner court; and beyond, the dark arches of a cloister garth that must have been a stable once.

The bald and withered slave who had admitted them went bobbing ahead, his slippers flapping on the flags; and so they were led up a broad and curving stair and through a dark passage to a white door, elaborately decorated with a raised design, and admitted at last into a spacious chamber.

The furnishings of the room were few, and included little not in common use at that time; yet some curious turn of mind, half primitive, half austere, of the person who had selected them had given the room an effect barbaric and exotic. There was no central light fixture. A single lighted lamp shed a bright yellow disk at its feet; the rest of its light was diffused through a shade of Indian red, leaving the room deep in warm shadow. Three walls of the room were of plain sea-gray, unadorned except for wall candelabra of brass; but the fourth wall was taken up by tall French windows, now swathed in straight-hanging mulberry drapes. Just below the ceiling ran a broad frieze, the color of clean ivory, its bas-relief figures dim in the stained light.

"Whose place is this?" Huston asked, without interest.

"A friend's," said Mark. "Sit down, Arn. Use this settee—it's very comfortable, really."

Huston turned impatiently, as if to speak to the negro, but he had disappeared. Huston remained standing obdurately by the door, his lower lids sagging, his face grayer and harsher than before.

"Come, come! Sit down."

"Nope. I'm leaving." He turned slow eyes on Wallace in a gaze implacable in its black distaste. But the fine eyes in the sensitive face did not flinch; they seemed disinterested, rather, and studiously contemplative.

"Where are you going? Will you turn in?"

"No, and I don't know where I'm going and I care less," Huston said.

His jaded body, flayed by a haunting restlessness that would not let it sleep, was turning him savage. The room looked odd to him, as if he were in liquor. A ragged, sawing pain was drawing at intervals across the base of his skull, his legs were weak with fatigue and all sensations were alike his enemies. He would have given a thousand to relax into genuine sleep; yet he was kept from it, more than anything else, by his conviction

that he could not. He must sleep soon, he knew; yet he knew no other way of hastening that end than to yield perpetually to his restlessness until that restlessness was borne down by utter exhaustion.

"You shouldn't have brought me here." As he snarled at Mark the red smolder in his eyes seemed to break into flame. "Learn now, I ain't an exhibit to show your friends—"

He stood swaying drunkenly on his legs, trying to steady himself enough to break from the room. And in this condition first set eyes on Jacqueline Du Moyne.

She appeared so quietly that he hardly knew at just what moment she entered the room. He had not noticed the door opposite him, through which she entered, for it was hung with tapestried folds in tone with the wall. She seemed to take form uncertainly before his fever-blurred eyes; he was unaware that she was there until he found himself staring at her. He realized vaguely that Mark Wallace was pursuing the formalities of introduction. He failed to catch her name, and stood confusedly trying to gather his shattered forces into something like a mannerly front.

He remembered afterward that he had not thought her beautiful, then. But he was surprized and ashamed—ashamed of that angry speech which she must have overheard. As she stood before him, a slender, relaxed figure with her hands quiet at her sides, it seemed that it was she who had been dragged out for him to look at, rather than the reverse.

He could not, though, ever remember what sort of thing she had worn. Something black, he guessed, that came up about her throat, for he recalled only the curiously pale oval of her face with the close dark hair about it and eyes so dark against the pallor of her skin that they seemed drawn in with charcoal or with India ink, and her slender hands.

She came slowly across to him as they were introduced, looking rather wonderingly at him, he thought. Had he been able to see his own haggard face he would not have been surprized. She seemed to hold his eyes with her own, and she gave him her hand, which he certainly did not expect. It was a cool hand, at once thin and soft, yet very steady, as if there might have been strength there that she had never found it necessary to use.

"Madame," he murmured in acknowledgment, and bowed rather lower over her hand than he usually did or had meant to. But still his eyes did not leave hers.

"Captain is weary," she said. There was the suggestion of a trill in the 'r', as if she had first learned a Latin tongue; but her voice came from low in her throat.

Again he was surprized, for he heard himself say—

"Yes, damn well corked!"

She flashed a glance at Mark Wallace, who murmured in apolgy—

"He hasn't slept for three nights."

"I—I must excuse myself," Huston faltered. "I really have to—to get along."

"Please don't go," she said gently, and his objections died on his lips. "Mark, turn the settee to the windows—so; this river is better for the captain to look at than my unlovely room."

Huston stepped forward to swing the settee, but Mark was before him. Jacqueline DuMoyne's slender, pale hands arranged cushions in the corners of the seat. Then she pulled a cord that drew back the mulberry draperies from one great window, unlatched the French casements and let them swing wide. Into the room came the mild fragrance of the outer air.

Huston's eyes sought the open dark beyond the balcony's wrought-iron lace. Over the French roofs of the one-story dwellings below he could see the darkly huddled buildings of the levee, and beyond these the river, black now that the moon had set, reflecting in broken, weaving bits the riding lights of seagoing ships. He could count the steamboats, where they lay ranked close against

the levee, by their tall twin stacks, by their pilot-houses that showed white over the roofs even in the night.

For several minutes Huston stood looking out at the port. Then he drew his breath slowly and said—

"This is a good place."

He noted curiously, when she had made him sit beside her on the broad settee, how luxuriously she reclined among its cushions, her knees crossed, her body relaxed. He was accustomed to think that ladies sat upright, with spines like pokers; yet the serene poise of her head would not permit him to consider her anything else. She was so suavely matter-of-fact that he also relaxed, and let himself settle into the cushions.

The settee was deep, the cushions gentle to the bandage under his coat. He could lean back his head and look out over the dark river where the little sternwheeler *Belle Marie* was passing, touched here and there with pins of light. She was drifting with the current, her idling paddle-wheels languidly bathing themselves in the black water.

"She's little," said Jacqueline DuMoyne, "but she handles prettily."

Huston turned his head to look at her. For once, he was thinking, a woman had said something sensible, something he could understand. He studied her profile, until her dark eyes turned on him; then he returned his gaze to the river, for now his only desire was for rest.

For a long time they sat in a silence that held neither search for words nor sense of constraint. He was aware at last that she was talking to him, though he hardly knew what she said. He realized that she was talking about the river and the bayou country, but her casual low voice did not seem to demand that he either listen closely or reply.

The sawing pain at the base of his skull was diminishing now. About him the stained lamplight was mellow; before him lay the river and the illimitable depths of the dark.

"A hundred miles of night," he thought. "This is a good place."

VI

HUSTON woke to find the sunlight pouring over the clean sheet under which he had slept. He stretched luxuriously and found that the skin of his back and shoulders felt whole again, his head was clear and his mind at peace. Mark Wallace was sitting with his feet on the table in the middle of Huston's bare little room. Now he snapped shut his book.

"It was a great night for sleep," said Huston lazily.

"Which one?" asked Wallace.

"Which one?"

"You've slept two nights and a day," Wallace told him. "I compute that you've slept better than thirty-five hours."

Huston looked dazed.

"When's the duel?"

"Tomorrow morning."

"This Friday?"

"Positively, Arn."

Huston's easy smile drew his lips back from his teeth.

"Well!" he ejaculated. He sat up and looked about him; and Wallace saw that though his eyes were puffy with sleep they were clear again. "My laundry should've come yesterday."

"It's here."

The riverman swung to his feet.

"Lord, I could eat a wolf!"

"Breakfast will be up in a few minutes. I ordered it as I came up."

"That's certainly a coincidence. After sleeping for thirty-five hours, I come to life just as breakfast is bein' brought up."

"No coincidence," said Wallace. "I set the head of your cot on a chair."

While Huston sponged and put on fresh clothes, a mulatto boy was laying a white cloth and a steaming breakfast. He noticed with satisfaction that though the food was plain there appeared to be a great quantity of it.

"If there's anything appeals to me," said Wallace, "it's to see you overeat and then complain about it."

He explained the various arrangements he had made for the affair with

Arnold's cousin. There would be Navy revolvers as requested; a secluded site had been agreed upon; at the last moment Mark Wallace had had misgivings about Will's marksmanship, and had got the distance increased from twenty paces to thirty-five. Arnold remained not enthusiastic.

"I almost think I won't shoot him after all," he offered.

"You certainly will not shoot him," said Wallace crisply.

"Why?"

"Because I have other plans for you."

"Let's hear some of 'em."

"Get something into you first."

Toward the end of a long breakfast Huston spoke through a mouthful of hot grits.

"Mark, who was that girl?"

"What girl? Oh, that one. Just a family friend."

"Never mind the family—who?"

"I don't want to talk about her now. I—"

"But I do!"

"Well then, she is Madame DuMoyne."

"Madame!"

"Mrs, then."

"Mrs!"

"Certainly." With an air more of disinterest than secretiveness, Mark Wallace pressed on to other subjects before this could sink in. "Arn, would you mind telling me just what your plans were before the *Peter Swain* burned?"

"What plans?"

"Financial—business—on the river."

The question was one Huston had answered for himself often enough, so that he was able to reply to it succinctly; and black coffee had made him communicative. The haggard grayness was out of his face and the smile that had seemed permanently frozen was now ready, deepening the grin creases in his thin cheeks.

"The *Swain* was just clearin' herself, Mark. You have no idea how little I began with. Even with that old wreck of a boat, I was loaded to the guards with mortgages—all the paper I could carry. I made money, plenty of it—a steamboat can't help it, hardly. But I put it back into the boat, to make a pretty packet of her. Then she had to have new boilers, and she went into dry-dock for caulkin' and patchin'. That's expensive. And her cabin was all done over; and I stuck twenty feet on her stern because her transom was ridin' too low; and finally put in new engines altogether.

"Oh, she was gettin' to be a fast boat, Mark," he grinned; the pain of his loss, apparently had left him entirely. "As sweet a little job as you'd want to see. And her mortgages were lifted—nearly. But she only got in a few trips before she burned. So I'm sunk."

He grinned again, wholeheartedly enough for a man who had lost the first stage of a fortune in one night's disaster.

"But," he interrupted himself, "you asked what I *meant* to do, didn't you? A second boat, of course. A third, a fourth and a fifth. Small boats for the way landin's, relay warehouses, city offices at Memphis, Natchez, Vicksburg, St. Louis; the biggest boats the river has seen yet for the through runs; feeder lines up the tributaries and as far as St. Paul. Then the Pittsburg trade—"

"And now that you're flat—what about it?"

"Begin again."

"Are there many claims against the *Peter Swain*—financial claims that can be carried through the courts?"

"Oh, lord, I'll bet there'll be a hundred! They'll come out now like worms after a rain."

"We'll sidestep all that. Put the total assets in the hands of a receiver and let the claimants fight it out."

"We?"

"It's the only thing to do, Arn. Absolves the boat, clears your skirts forever, beats the man whose five-dollar mule is worth three hundred now that it is dead."

"Oh yes, of course, but—"

"I said 'we,' " explained Wallace, his fine eyes studying the lean face of his friend intently, "because you're taking me into partnership now."

"Oh what are you talkin' about?" Arnold swallowed a chuckle.

"That is what I intend to demonstrate."

Wallace's patient smile would have been sarcastic on the face of another, but Mark's sensitive features made any sort of smile beautiful.

"I don't doubt in the least, Mark, that you have money; and I reckon you're offerin' to throw some into the breach, and it's mighty fine of you and all that, but—"

"But I'm a hopeless ignoramus about steamboating."

"Well—put it that you don't know the hazards of the river."

"Just by way of curiosity, Arn," Mark digressed, "how many trips did the *Willis K. Humphrey* make to St. Louis last year?"

"Nine or ten."

"Eight. What was the second biggest item, in dollars, that she carried? What was the cargo, I mean?"

"Sugar."

"Jute!"

"Oh nonsense."

"It's not nonsense; it's a fact."

Huston forked his eleventh slice of bacon and glanced at the other sharply.

"Who owns the Demerest Line?" he asked.

"Not a syndicate, as you suppose. That's just another of your mistaken ideas. Mordecai Leonard, of Pittsburg."

"That's news to me," said Huston skeptically.

"Naturally," returned Mark suavely.

Amused by Wallace's undisguised attempt, but a little exasperated by its success, Huston fished up a question from the obscurities of the field he knew best.

"How much water was there in Cat's Head Cut-off last week, at the shoalest point?" he demanded.

"Nine feet," said Mark, "when Jeff Morton took the *Samson* through."

"Great Scott," cried Arnold, "what manner of man is this?"

"I cheated on you that one," Wallace chuckled. "I only happened to overhear that. Now answer a sensible question. Tell me all you know about the *Frontier City*."

"Old Captain Pumpernickel's boat?" asked Huston, stifling his chuckle with toast. "Well, she had a fast keel. But her upper works made her topheavy. She was under-engined, for economy, so she was slow, and the engines were old, so she wasted her steam. Somethin' killed her as a passenger boat—"

"Fleas," put in Wallace.

"Say," said Huston, sitting back again, "I guess you know everythin', don't you?" He raised his brows in mock admiration.

"No, no, go ahead."

"Well, her rudders were hung wrong, and Pumpernickel was too cheap—"

"Too poor."

"—too cheap to change 'em, so the pilots wore themselves out sweatin' at the wheel, and the whole affair had a very poor name. And crabbiness from havin' a little authority—"

"Anxiety," Mark corrected.

"—lost the big end of her trade and she went broke. And she's now lyin' in a bayou up the Teche. And he wants a fortune for her, which he won't get, because her timbers are rotten as cork."

"I beg your pardon," said Mark, "but all your later statements were incorrect. For instance, she can be bought, by proper handling, for less than five thousand."

"He's come down, then. Anyway, you can build the beat of her for fifteen."

"Where'll you get the fifteen? And her timbers are not rotten, but sound as the day she was made."

"I can poke my fist through her!"

"You can go see for yourself, Arn; that's what I did."

"I haven't five thousand, and—"

"I have!"

"—it'd cost ten thousand to put her in shape, engines and all."

"Too high, by half! But I have it, Arn."

"Huh? You have?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Look here, Mark, I know you're all steamed up over the idea of our floatin'

this old wreck of a boat and all; and there's nothing in the world I'd like better. But, —— it, Mark, you don't see what we're up against. Just to get the boat is only a start. Five thousand runnin' money has to come in before she pays. Anyway that much. I *know* this game, Mark—I haven't sweat night after night tryin' to make a dollar work for four, with my whole stake in it?

"I've played that game and beat it—and where am I now? One unlucky night and—whoof! Broke. I've beat this before and I'll beat it again, by ——, but don't you get into it! You put your money where it's safe, Mark, and leave the river run. You don't like that, I know, but a poor friend I'd be if I told you anythin' else. God help the man the river gets—it'll make you old faster than any game in the world; and for every man it makes, it breaks fifty more, so help me God if I'm lyin' to you!"

Mark was unperturbed in manner and in tone, but the flush over his cheek bones and the surface light in his eyes betrayed the quiver behind the suavity of his mask.

"I could get twenty captains to-morrow—" he began.

"Go ahead if you want to, but you'll never get trimmed on account of me, Mark. That's all I can say."

"—but as it happens," Mark went on as if he had not heard, "it won't be necessary, because I've decided upon you. As for—"

"You're no more built for the river, Mark, than I'm built for plantin'. You've—"

"That's why I need you. As for the money, it's mostly raised capital, it'll have to be protected by insurance and it'll have to be turned. So there's no use talking about keeping it safe."

Huston looked at him for a long time, hardly knowing what to say.

"What in the world have you been about?" he asked at last.

"Just looking around, Arn."

They let that soak in for a while.

"Are you offerin' me a job, Mark?" Huston presently asked, in a tone between curiosity and something else that Mark could not have named.

"No, I'm asking for a part in a project."

"I'll have to know where the money is comin' from."

"You will." Mark Wallace yawned and rose. "You have a letter," he said. "I didn't mention it, because I wanted your attention. You can have it now, though." He handed Huston an envelope, and prepared to leave. "Think over what I've said."

"Wait, Mark!"

"No, I'm going home to bed. Come around to my room any time of night—but day is for sleep."

He was gone. Important as his statements had appeared to be to Huston's interests, he temporarily forgot them as soon as Mark had left. The envelope before him was addressed in a hand he had seldom seen, yet was unlikely to forget. He ripped open the envelope; then smiled as he studied the single line of writing which the inclosed sheet contained.

Come to Mandeville

It was written in uneven copybook characters, as by the hand of a child. There was no signature, but he knew its source well enough; and by the very brevity of the message he was able to perceive the attenuated struggle, the prolonged embarrassed uncertainty that had mothered those words.

TO BE CONTINUED

Adventure's Abyssinian EXPEDITION

★ *Second Report by* GORDON MacCREAGH

THE SAFARI conductor and guide is one of those gems of purest ray serene born to waste his brilliance on the desert air. As he introduces himself in all his simplicity—

"I'm an old Africander, and I know my way about pretty well."

But there lie many volumes of romance behind that unpretentious recommendation. Twenty years in the African bush, driven from one lone fastness to another by the slow advance of civilization. South, Rhodesia, British East, Angola, pre-war German East, Uganda, Somaliland, and now Abyssinia. From the staid respectability of trader and hunter to that awful crime against the British administration of its huge one-third of Africa, the offense that causes tape-bound officials to foam their helpless indignation—ivory poacher! And from that odium risen again to the latest and extreme eminence of gun-runner, flouting thereby the pompous decrees of the three surrounding nations that arms shall not come into free Abyssinia.

Of course his reputation among the smugly law-abiding white community is as frightful as is inevitable in a small alien community where everybody knows everybody else's business and has little else to do but mind it with a watchful eye. For a small white community in a large foreign city is as isolated as is Main Street in the vastness of the Middle West.

My good guide's own legation repudiates him with official horror. His countrymen warn me solemnly one by one. Busybody nobodies who have zealously kept the eleventh commandment lift their eyebrows and exclaim, "What, you're thinking of taking that man?" and wait eagerly for me to demand, "Why not?" Which I don't; leaving them to volunteer their information, to warn me with the slimy solicitude of small-town residents for the stranger in their midst.

And it all amounts to the usual slogan of Main Street.

"Of course, I have nothing against the man personally. But so-and-so says—"

Serious investigation—since one must be so desperately careful about one's trail companions—elicits nothing more

★ *See Camp-Fire.*

definite than what to me are distinct recommendations—ivory-poaching and gun-running. So "Jim" is duly engaged, and rolls up his sleeves and pitches in with a wealth of advice born out of his experience of men and mules and supplies and contracts and sureties and all the tangle of paraphernalia that belongs with an Abyssinian safari, though the white folks in Abyssinia have adopted the old Boer word for it. Trekking on mule caravan, they call it.

This is to be only a small caravan, for after bedraggling all across Europe with the horror of twenty-two cases, I am grimly determined to go light. Yet I can't cut it down to less than the awful total of three riding-mules and ten-pack mules and all the inconceivable mess and intricate formality of Abyssinian trekking.

To begin with, one must first obtain a permit from the Minister of the Interior to go traveling anywhere in the country; otherwise one is stopped at various unexpected district frontiers by petty local governors who refuse further passage without first seeing a royal passport. But Jim shrewdly opines that a permit to go down amonst those ferocious Galla tribes, from where an armed expedition of seven hundred men has just returned, will not be granted; and, says he further:

"What do we want permits for? All those interfering local governor fellows will have been scared far away from their dens. We'll just make a bluff of our mule-men that we've got permits and we'll sneak down."

The deciding vote lies with the timid lady who rules my destinies.

"D'you think it will be all right?" she asks me.

How could *Adventure's* expedition dare even to hint that it might possibly be not all right? I look across at Jim's glance of sardonic appraisal and I assure my wife that of course it will be all right. So she decides that we go, and hang the permits.

But it is a different matter with the "boys." Mule-men, tent-boys, gun-bearers; they have never grown to have a comforting dependence upon my personal prowess, nor on Jim's. That Galla country is full of tall, fierce men with spears, and the boys have no foolhardy ambitions to go a-sporting. It might be all right for Frangis' white folks; but Gallas are a turbulent folk and many of them don't properly believe yet that they have been subdued by Menelik the Lion, and none of them like Abyssinians.

Boys must have double pay to go down into the Arussi; and there must be a whole lot of them—no less than a round dozen of them to attend to the needs of three white folks and thirteen mules.

With haggling and persuasion and promises of protection, the number is reduced down eventually to nine. No high-handed appeal to a commissioner to supply labor; no threats here, as might be the case over all of the rest of Africa. For be it remembered this is free Abyssinia, and the white man is not master. Boys will work for hire; but if at any time they don't like their jobs they can just pack up and go.

So a system has grown up in Abyssinia whereby boys hire out under contracts, signed and sealed with a thumbprint. And since the individual boy may well be an irresponsible to whom a contract means nothing, each one must bring a guarantor—some person of substance in the town who will sign and thumbprint with the boy and who can then legally be held accountable for his protégé's good behavior and honesty. There is in Abyssinia a thriving business done in guarantees. It is quite as formal and much more complicated than bonding a cashier for a bank. And, this being Africa, it takes its full and proper time.

A week is spent in finding boys brave enough to go into the Arussi, and by them in finding guarantors reckless enough to thumbprint with them. And them, having duly signed, sealed and delivered themselves into hire for a certain pay, they institute the age-old pastime of bargaining for themselves.

One boy has no shoes and he can't go into the bush barefoot. He persists in

his refusal to budge out of town, contract notwithstanding, till the very last minute—and then he produces shoes from his voluminously draped *shamma* and is in no wise ashamed. Another will surely get sunstroke in the hot and low-lying lake region without a hat. Another must have an advance of pay to leave with his mother who is sick and will probably die during his absence. Another has a debt which he must pay; otherwise he will be caught and chained to his creditor before leaving town.

These are only the beginnings of the trials attendant upon trek.

Then mules. It is a question of permanent argument among those who go on caravans whether to buy or to hire. To buy one must be a financier. Mules are the inexorable necessity of travel and they cost accordingly. Twice as much as horses, which are well enough for riding about town but which can't stand a gruelling day after day. Plain pack-mules, and with sore backs at that, cost between fifty and sixty dollars; and riding-mules run into anything that one can afford to pay. Rich men will spend as much as six hundred for a fast ambler. But those pearls of their kind are not for caravans into the bush. As much as hundred dollars, perhaps, one would have to pay for a good serviceable trek saddle-mule.

The alternative is a *nagadi*. *Nagadis* are God's lowest creatures. They are people who contract to hire themselves out with mules by the day or week or month, with thumbprints and guarantors galore among their own breed and waiting round the corner. And then they know every trick of their amazing law and every subterfuge of ape-cunning to ignore every item of their contract.

They will without hesitation gang together and sign up to travel wherever their hirer says and whenever he says and as far as he says and to make camp at whatever spot he may select. And then they will do exactly as they please for as long as the hirer can tolerate them and stay out on trek.

They have many evil generations ago outgrown the petty tricks of "stick" and "bad water farther on" and "tired mules." Such excuses are crudities, good enough for the simple wiles of such unenlightened schemers as Chinamen or Greeks. No, *nagadis* will come humbly and request a short halt in order that they may rearrange loads that have been knocked off balance and are galling the mules.

And then they will unload the whole caravan with leisurely stealth and will neglect to hobble the most elusive of their beasts and will spend the rest of a good afternoon in a fruitless pretense of trying to catch them again. Until the frenzied white man will admit that it is too late to go any farther that day.

Or they will organize a sudden hubbub and will come running to announce that a dufflebag or something has been torn off a pack by a thorn bush somewhere back on the trail; and the whole caravan must wait, of course, while they go and look for it. Then, when they feel that the helpless white man is convinced of the futility of going farther, they will produce it from the scrub patch where they have cached it. And as often as not, some thief—"some passing Galla," they will declaim with virtuous disgust—will have pilfered something out of the package while it lay on the trail far from their staunch protection.

Today, at this date of writing, a tired and dispirited man told me how a unique collection of photographic negatives, representing three years of patient labor, was "swept away by the torrent" while crossing a three-foot deep ford, just because he had been foolish enough to pack a coveted Mauser pistol in that particular case.

And what could he do? What can anybody do who must needs traffic with the *nagadi* animal? This particular man admits frankly that he just wept; and he put away his camera and all his apparatus and has never had the heart to take a photograph since.

And that is just about all that one can do. Except, being forewarned, to see that one is forearmed as well as may be

possible. To superintend, to follow, to watch. To be ever on the alert against a completely conscienceless force that holds all the odds.

Which is what we did. Jim, with all his experience of the brute, and I, with whatever knowledge I had gathered of the guile of men in the wickeder corners of the earth. To buy mules was out of the question—at all events for such a trip. We would be buying in the capital city, the most expensive market at the most expensive time. We would be taking our beasts to an outlying district, the cheapest market—and where nobody had any currency anyway.

Even were we to bring them all of them back to the capital, we would be coming in shortly before the beginning of the rainy season when nobody would be buying mules. Everybody, on the contrary, would be trying to sell in order to avoid the expense of keeping and feeding their beasts through a period when travel would be at a standstill, cut off by a thousand foaming yellow torrents in a countryside where the only bridges are the five built by the railroad.

So I set my teeth and hired *nagadis*. And we plotted and planned with elaborate detail, Jim and I, to be wary as serpents and to circumvent the forces of Apollyon on their own ground. In which we succeeded only partially. That is to say we lost nothing. But the wear and tear on our nerves and the incessant irritation of the brutes all but succeeded in ruining the trip.

But "even evil hath its end." The details of *nagadi* and boy hire were completed at last. The final arrangement was four *nagadis* with their mules and five camp-boys, whom we planned to divide into two parties and play against each other to our own benefit. That meant separate food, separate blankets and boys' tent, but well worth it to our own peace of mind.

The caravan got away with no worse unpleasantness than that the *nagadis* turned up at the eleventh hour with sore-backed mules, despite the quite irrelevant fact that their contract stipulated well healed beasts—for there are no caravan mules in all Abyssinia that have not been pack-galled at some time or other—and that the mules that had been previously inspected by Jim had been decently free of sores. These were the selfsame animals, the *nagadis* swore by the cross and by St. George; and—well, what could the white man do?

At the last moment it was decided to let Jim take the caravan down two days' trek to a point where my wife and I could catch it on the railroad and thus save some of a long trip through uninteresting country before we should come to the rumored lake of our desire where roamed the fierce hippo that ate men and canoes.

And at that, even after saving two days, the lake that was a full four days' trek from the capital turned out to be four days beyond that—four long and hard days, each of seven and eight hours in the saddle. Let those who know saddles and the poignant pleasure of breaking in after a long period of enervating chairs accord to us a full measure of sympathy.

Particularly to my wife, whose "guaranteed quiet" mule brought by the *nagadis* bolted on the very first day out and threw her into a mimosa thorn patch. A fall that, besides scratches, left a bruise as big as a plate.

Why, in the circumstances, the need of such long and tortured marches during those first days? Because the law of the bush is inexorable. From water to water.

Ghastly country, that. A vast alluvial plain between far brown humps of volcanic ridges to east and to west; sloping gradually southward to where a jumbled chain of wide-spreading shallow lakes persists in spite of six months of rainless heat. Geologically speaking, I believe that this must be the beginning of the Great African Rift that continues on through Lakes Rudolf and Tanganyika.

I don't know whether it is correct to speak of alluvial silt. But that is what this interminable valley seems to consist of. Good black earth, rich enough to grow

anything that man needs—if only man could somehow provide water. And there will never be any means of providing water, for even the mountain ridges are burned brown and arid. Wells can be dug, and at depths of from forty to sixty feet water of a drinkable brackishness can be found. But wells can not adequately supply water for agriculture.

At a place called Modjo, where we left the railroad to join our caravan, a brown little river struggles through its gorge that it has scoured out of the earth in its recurrent periods of monsoon might. Here a hospitable German, whom the war robbed of his all in what used to be German East Africa, has built himself a homestead and is planting out a farm to supply the needs of the capital.

It seems that he has experimented with nothing yet that doesn't thrive. It must be remembered that the altitude is high enough to grow all the European fruits. His property is somewhere between six and seven thousand feet high; and here apples and pears and peaches wax fat. Alongside of them are the semi-tropical papayas and pomegranates and oranges and lemons. A patch of Egyptian cotton yields bolls that look like those that the railroad offices display in New York to attract people to go South—and this man had never heard of a boll-weevil. Coffee is the identical grade that comes to us out of Abyssinia under the trade name of longberry mocha. Temperature stands at around a fairly constant sixty-eight.

And this man, having done all this, having wrested his oasis out of the forbidding wilderness—what do you think is his ambition?

To sell it all and come to America. He would keep visiting Americans for so many weeks as they could afford time to stay; and he embarrasses omniscient authors by asking persistent questions about the price of five acres of land somewhere not too far from a town, and about the merits of raising hogs as against going farther south and trying fruit; or about what there is to all this advertising he sees in occasional American magazines about breeding silver foxes and being your own boss.

All that I can tell him about these bucolic pursuits is that farmers in America seat and unseat presidents according to the amount of governmental relief accorded to their perennial distress, and that advertisements about silver foxes are to be regarded as warily as those about growing mushrooms in your cellar. From the metropolitan press complaints I do know that the high cost of farm labor is driving millions of farmers into cities. I don't know what is the cost of farm labor in America, but I feel safe in assuring this eager would-be citizen that it is twenty times as high as his own. He pays his men all of three dollars a month, and their day lasts as long as God's good sun lets it.

Possibly some harassed farmer in America, reading all the foregoing manifest recommendations, would like to effect an exchange with this gentleman.

I met another German farmer in an outlying district where coffee propagated itself so persistently that it interfered with his cattle-grazing, and where his labor cost him six dollars and a cotton bedsheet for a suit per year, and where men would come and ask to be allowed to work gratis six months to show their worth before being taken on.

This man does not want to sell.

But I digress. It is easier to write about the pleasant thing than about the downright uncomfortable and mean one.

And that is what trekking through that long valley is. One leaves the hospitable German oasis with a qualm at the arid prospect before one; and in fifteen minutes one is enmeshed in the desperate thorn bush.

Dusty black-brown earth; parched yellow-brown clumps of sparse grass; starved gray-brown, straggling mimosa scrub. And thorns. Gods of torture, what thorns! Nothing thrives except thorns. The so-called mimosa scrub is really euphorbia in a condition of arrested development. Stunted trees with the minimum of tiny leaves that offer no shade, they struggle for their desiccated

lives just far enough apart to permit of picking one's way between them on mule-back, and just close enough together to insist upon a ceaseless vigilance of swaying and ducking under and fending off with a stick the long tough branches that reach out in horizontal confusion, waiting to tear themselves across a rider's face.

All the meager nourishment that this pestilential scrub has been able to draw from the shriveled soil seems to have been concentrated in its thorns. Long, robust thorns with stout, bulbous, velvety bases. Two and three inches long, tapering away to fire-hardened needlepoints, diabolically designed not to break off but to dig into clothing and underlying flesh and to rip like nails in a board fence. A scrub perfected by nature for no purpose but offense.

In among this scrub appears every here and there a slender green-stemmed vine with shiny green heart-shaped leaves—invitingly green and cool to behold in that maze of dried-up thorn. This is the deadly wait-a-bit. Its thorns are small and rose-bushy, but warped by an ingrowing hate against their fate in being condemned to such company, they are hooked backward. And the vine is wire cable and the thorns tempered steel. When wait-a-bit drops a coil across mule or rider, one waits. There is no dragging through or shaking clear. The cable must be unwound.

Then, towering here and there over the dwarfted scrub like protective umbrellas are flat-topped acacias, so typical of African scenery. Acacia thorns, since some of the substance of the soil has gone into the tree, are not quite so fatly nourished as those of the stunted euphorbia, but they are similar in texture and evil temperament.

At wider intervals in the maze of thorn growth, sometimes singly, sometimes in stark, repellent groups, are massive thirty-foot candelabra cactuses with poisoned thorns projecting at every two inches of each ridge of their thick, five-sided fleshy leaves.

That is all. That is the "bush" of upland Abyssinia. One picks a lacerated way through it and comes to the age-old wonder as to why pestiferous things exist in such profusion in God's world. Of what use is any of this growth? Is it barely possible that the natives, in their struggle to maintain life, have discovered some arduous method of extracting some sort of service out of it? Inquiry of those who know the country elicits an answer in the disgusted negative. It seems that none of this pest growth is of any known use to man. Not even for firewood. The natives prefer to use their meager collections of cattle chips.

One is forced to the conclusion that trekking through mimosa scrub is one of the preparatory tests that the red gods impose upon their foolish devotees.

Time drags as interminably as mule travel always must. One ruminates tortuously about coining a new proverb; something about pack-mules and tortoises. Plodding, patient beasts—four miles an hour is the best that can be expected of a pack caravan; and that, when the going is good. Saddle-mules may be beaten into a short and exhilarating gallop of as much as fifty whole yards where occasional breaks in the bush allow it. But one must not leave the packs out of sight with those *nagadis*. So something less than an average of four miles an hour is the pace.

The guide winds away to left or right, making long and needless detours, it would seem, where the bush in front offers no worse going. One becomes obstinate in one's own sense of direction and forges stubbornly ahead, till one finds oneself suddenly on the brink of a sheer cleft, a jagged knife-gash in the plain, perhaps thirty feet across and twice as many feet deep. It is dry just now; as dry as everything else in that brutal valley. But when the rain will one day fall on one of those burned brown mountains, the gash will become suddenly a foaming millrace with drowned cattle floating in it.

One curses the gash spitefully and admits grudgingly that the guide was right in the first instance, and tries to speed up and catch up with him as best as one may.

Thorny bush is not sympathetic toward speeding up. One pays for one's hasty obstinacy.

Seven hours of this. Tempers are like crackling matchwood. No alertness of attention, no skill of swift bending and dodging suffices to traverse some twenty miles of thorn bush without scathe. What do women do who can not curse loudly and who must not swear at a vicious scratch across the cheek? I look at my wife and conceive a certain measure of respect for feminine patience.

Yet trekking through the mimosa scrub, like the Scriptural evil, is not without end. The guide points with his chin and grunts—he is too trek-weary to talk—

"There's the Hawash."

The Hawash is the next water. That means camp. Drink. Heavenly relief from the saddle. Rest. And later, perhaps, food—though food is an unappealing matter of little consequence just now. One looks as eagerly in the direction pointed as must have the whole of Xenophon's ten thousand at the cry of "*thalatta.*" But one sees nothing, of course. The Hawash River is sunken fifty feet below the plain level in the ravine that it has carved for itself.

But presently there impinges through one's weariness a consciousness of trees. Tall trees, different from the flat-topped acacias. These are huge and round. Upon closer approach, they are seen to have leaves. Real, wide, juicy leaves. And there is movement in them—live things. Monkeys. They curse the unexpected intrusion on the privacy of their supper and scatter to other, farther trees. There is a whole long line of these splendd trees—wild figs with vast, wide-spreading branches knotted with their queer clusters of fruit that grow apparently on the bark.

And there at the base of their great twisted roots is the deep gash in the earth. Mud-rimmed and flat and dirty and beautiful. The Hawash River. Two feet deep and fifty feet wide and full of crocodiles; but real, wet, liquid water.

And on the other side will be camp. Tired and sore though we are, man and beast, we must contrive to hustle the caravan through the mud and on to the high bank on the other side. For Jim, hardened old Africander, has a rule, even in the dry season.

"Always cross a river when you come to it," he says, "'cause you never know what may happen overnight."

And Jim is right.

An interesting point about this Hawash River is that, while lower down it becomes one of the largest in Abyssinia, it never reaches the sea. It is known to get down somewhere into the deserts of Eritrea and then nobody knows what happens to it. Its fate has never been explored; but the theory is that it is entirely absorbed by the thirsty sand.

FIRST night camp is always of interest. At all events, to those who make it. Confusion, of course, is to be expected in a first camp. I have made many, and each time I have made oath that I would profit by past experience and that everything would be in its proper pack and every pack in its proper place and that nothing would be forgotten. And never have I achieved the perfect first night out.

But this camp was beyond the lowest deep of degradation for amateur bungling. My own excuse to cover my shame is that I had never trekked in Africa before and it was quite impossible for me, of course, to conceive even a glimmering dream of the talent that the African boy has for doing the wrong thing at the wrong time and putting the wrong thing in the wrong place.

Jim, on the other hand, had always traveled with the maximum of efficiency and the minimum of what he calls luxurious equipment—the least necessary number of mules and a couple of hard-trained, experienced boys; and he hadn't given sufficient consideration to the mathematical truth that ten boys together are a hundred times more idiotic than just two.

And to help things be cheerful, it was dark, of course, by the time the whole caravan of mules had been persuaded, hauled or beaten into sliding down the

steep mud bank of the Hawash ravine and across the river. It ought not, by all the rules of trek, to have been dark after seven hours on the trail and an hour at a ford. But what caravan ever got away on time on the first day—or, with *nagadis*, on the twentieth day?

You who have been caught by twilight with a little canoe full of camp gear, consider a caravan of ten packs in the dark.

But I must admit a moon. A thin moon rose presently on our swearful scrabbling among tent-pegs and miles of rope, and then we were able to see where the *nagadis* had unloaded the mule that we told them to unload at our elbow and where else some boy had carried a pack that we had been sitting upon a moment before.

I had brought a patient one-pole and four-peg tent guaranteed to go up in less than five minutes—and, as a matter of fact, I had put up that same tent, single-handed, in seventy-two seconds during a speed test. With the help of three Ethiopian boys that night it was more than three-quarters of an hour from the time we started till cots were opened up and blankets unrolled.

Jim's tent was one of those eight by nine wall-tents, requiring the standard three poles and twelve pegs to set it up; and over that, a fly that required fourteen more pegs and an African plain to give it rope room. Yet it stood, fly and all; drunkenly, but it stood, in less than half the time mine had taken.

And the explanation of the phenomenon was that ten generations of white men had been teaching boys in Africa how to set up just that kind of antiquated tent; and it would take just as many more generations to establish the necessary hereditary familiarity with any modern improvement.

Food was a matter of little interest that night. We were all too tired; and the only utensil that the cook could find was the coffee pot. So we made a brew in it of Hawash mud and tea, which tasted accordingly; we ate some bread and clammy sausage—a last minute purchase, because Jim's two dogs had eaten all the bacon; we looked at the awful litter of ten mule-loads of gear lying everywhere and anyhow, more or less within the square formed by our tents and the two belonging to the *nagadis;* and we cursed it all and went to bed.

And then the *nagadis* pegged out a camel rope and brought all the mules in and tethered them in a line right in the middle of our *laager*. At this I raised a weary protest from within my tent; for I did emphatically not see the need of waking up in a stable. But I was told, oh no, it was a very necessary precaution indeed, as I would probably soon see.

As, of course, I did. That night a beast of a hyena came and prowled round the *laager* and howled at exact intervals like a foghorn, paying not the least attention to the dogs that barked themselves frantic and raced up and down well within the limits of our square, not daring to go out and attack it.

Now I have always heard and read that hyenas are cowardly beasts that live entirely upon carrion; and probably that is true of the lowland striped species. But the upland Abyssinian hyenas are great spotted brutes that will tear down a straggling mule single-handed and that every now and then get away with native children. They seem to be the particular pest of Abyssinian travel, and they are the cause of endless trouble and delay.

There is nothing laughable about them. No laughing hyenas these. Their howl is a raucous *whroo-oo-oo-ee-eeh*, with all the volume and far-reaching quality of a Long Island Sound fog signal.

I crawled out of my blankets to see whether I could catch a glimpse of my first Abyssinian hyena. But white moonlight on the mimosa scrub and black shadows beneath were all my reward. Later that night, when the thing seemed to be howling right within the *laager*, Jim got out and got a shot at it, with the result only of chasing the brute to howl a little farther off beyond our tents.

And then my wife almost kept me awake, wanting to know whether hyenas

could burst through tent canvas, and whether they liked to eat people, and whether my various weapons were handy, and what one should do if it came in. I think I told her in my sleep that one ought swiftly to climb the tent pole; and I forgot how often she woke me up to tell me that she could hear it sniffing at the back of our tent.

And so "the evening and the morning were the first day." It was not a good day, that first one.

And the second day was like unto it. Except that we made a short trek that day, because my wife was badly bruised and had stiffened from her fall of the day before. So we camped near a Galla village of four huts within a thorn fence, for we knew that where there was a village there must be water.

I have never understood that village. It was in the middle of nowhere at all—the flattest, the most shadeless and the hottest portion of all that plain. And the water-hole was one long mile and a half distant; and it was the worst water that I have ever drunk anywhere in all my life. "It was crawling and it stunk" to the ultimate limit of human consumption. Straining through a handkerchief disclosed slimy things with myriad tiny legs in the water, and the coffee that we boiled in it had all the wholesome aroma of a cow byre.

That second one was not a very good day either.

But improvement began to come after that. Possibly because we were beginning to grow to fit the shape of our saddles; possibly because we broke camp at midnight and traveled by the cool of the moon; possibly because the country really began to be better. Going gradually lower and nearer to the beginning of the lake system, we began to come to wide stretches of low-lying country which would be impassable swamps of mud in the rainy season and now were almost moist and green. There was a pleasant little river for a long rest over the heat of the day; and evening saw us at the shores of a vast lake.

At least Jim said that a lake was there. But all that was visible was a solid mile deep of tall papyrus swamp and a reedy puddle out of which we snatched our coffee water before the caravan mules got into it.

But there were evidences of lake somewhere beyond the papyrus barrage. Mosquitoes as soon as dusk fell, Jersey size and African disposition, which stung clear through cord riding-breeches. The night was full of the swish of low-hurtling wings, and of a long, wailing cry that was not hyenas. Hunting dogs, the boys said—worse than hyenas. And then with the brightness of the moon, the honk of fleets of automobiles passing overhead.

Distinctly there was a lake somewhere. But not our lake; not the water that we were aiming for, where the big hippo conducted his raids.

And the early moonlight start was a mistake; for we had, perforce, to travel along a wide stretch of open slope between the papyrus and the bush fringe that marked where the lake came up to when it rained; and the mosquitoes of all North Africa found out about it at once.

But there were compensations. With the dawn, large ground-hugging creatures that had looked like sleepy rabbits turned out to be fat brown geese that walked sedately in pairs and refused to fly until the dogs chased them. Guinea-fowl clacked inanely and ran with the speed of foxes and the aimlessness of ants, then took to the low branches of trees and peered with clownish inquisitiveness at our intrusion. Egrets stood white sentinel over nothing, clean-cut against the dark green at amazing distances. Gaunt adjutant-storks stalked like professors immersed in thought about the elusive habits of frogs.

And then, with full daybreak, a queer creature like a very large wolf with abnormally long ears chased the scouting dogs out of the bush fringe and stood and screamed at us. The gun-boys were where gun-boys always are—in some other part of Africa. I dismounted and tried to stalk the beast with a Luger pistol, but it retreated into the bush; and the dogs

came with me and growled at all the places where it was not. Then, when I gave up the hunt, it came back to the bush fringe and screamed again. It must have been behind me all the time.

This was beginning to be good country. Later, Galla huts began to appear in the distance, well away from the mosquito belt; round, dome-roofed thing of mud, wattle and thatch; four or five of them apparently family groups, enclosed in their encircling fence of thorn bush. Tall spearmen stood and looked at us from their corral gates with aloof suspicion; but proffered neither hospitality nor hostility.

Later again, after we had left the lake behind us, there was a great, far-spreading village of many hundred dome-shaped brown residences. A whole tribe in force. Till we came closer and found them to be ant-hills. Termite mounds ten, twelve and twenty feet in height. We were distinctly relieved. We were none too certain about the Galla disposition after the recent military expedition; and Gallas, we reasoned, would surely not elect to live in a district where the termite pest was so prolific. Since then I am convinced that not even Gallas know why they elect to live where they do.

Here was an opportunity. We had been looking out, Jim and I, for some thick-boled tree from which we might peel the bark and make on the white stem a target to sight in our rifles. But never a usable tree had we come upon in all that burned-out plain. Slim acacias offered no width, and the fig trees by the river banks, while their stems were sometimes thirty feet around, were so shaded by their enormous branches that swept the ground as to be impossible.

Here a big ant-hill offered a splendid target where we could follow every shot and there was a choice of many ranges among mounds convenient for making a splendid elbow and muzzle rest. So we cut away a comfortable rest out of one at about a hundred and fifty yards and fired a half string of shots apiece. I, more than Jim, because mine was a Lyman .48 peep-sight fitted to a Savage rifle, three hundred caliber, model 99. This sight was designed expressly as a receiver sight for the Springfield sporting models; and my own amateur gunsmith craft in fitting it to the Savage called for quite some adjustment.

We fired perhaps fifteen shots in all over a space of ten minutes. While we were still firing we heard, between shots, a far-away shrill *oo-ooh-ooh* that spread in all directions and ever farther into the distance. We grinned and told each other that those must be natives who were shrilling their frightened warnings to each other that war had suddenly descended upon them again. Rather a joke upon the poor, foolish natives, we thought, that they should have been scared into the tall timber by our little harmless rifle practise.

What were these stories about warlike Gallas, almost as fierce as the Masai? Still, who could blame them so shortly after a military force of seven hundred had been through their country?

So we finished our test and mounted again; and we had barely gotten under way when we found our road cut off before us by a party of spearsmen. Other men flitted between the thorn scrub farther away. Horses galloped through the bush. *Oo-ooh oo-ooh* sounded all around us; and closer, not rapidly farther away.

Gallas to right of us, Gallas to left of us; some mounted, some afoot. Every one naked for the war and armed with two or more spears apiece; they had come hotfoot to see what this war was about.

It was then that we made swift mental offerings to our various gods that we had come away without official permits and the attendant paltry guard of half a dozen *zabanias*, or Abyssinian soldiers with their uniforms. For that would have looked in all truth like the foolhardy scouting party of a new war; and these Gallas didn't look to be at all afraid.

They ringed us around, and the farther bush crackled with the coming of more of them. Then Jim spoke quickly to one

of his boys, a Galla lad from farther north, who translated.

He said that we were not Abyssinians, as could be seen; that we were passing peaceably on a hunting trip; and that, as we went by, the evil spirit who inhabited that ant-hill had cursed us from within; so, of course, we had stopped and shot it.

Quite so. That was a perfectly understandable explanation to those tall tribesmen; and they came and examined the ant-hill and stuffed their arms into the almost explosive holes made by the 180-grain bullets and said, *aie*, that that evil spirit must quite surely be dead. And after some more bush-country talk—who we were and where we were going and so on—they drifted away, back into their thorn scrub.

And we heard their shrill calls again to their hidden villages. Another kind of *ooo-ooo-ooh*, higher and longer drawn out than their war call to the gathering, which we had fondly told ourselves was their call of alarm. This was their call of reassurance to their women folks. Afterward we came to know that these Gallas had *no* call of alarm.

Concluding

ARTHUR O. FRIEL'S *The Devil's*

FIVE hundred miles up the Orinoco, the Devil's Castle, a great pinnacled rock, which held the secret of Spanish booty hidden when starvation had interrupted flight from the Andes and Raffael Dussault's ancestor had turned cannibal upon his companions, had finally been reached by Dussault and his companion, Julian Marden, American.

Many men had reached the castle before, but none had returned. Marden and Dussault had been watched for days by a man on a near-by peak, one of Las Tetas. The watcher could not gage their progress; he could not see the eel and the snake from which Marden had rescued Dussault; he could not see the jaguar which had stalked about their tent.

When the two men gained the top of the castle they were concealed by the turret-like bowlders which gave the rock its resemblance to a castle. So eager were they to search for the jewels that they soon forgot the dangers of their task. Marden forgot that he mistrusted this descendant of a cannibal, Dussault, who drugged a boat's crew with sleeping powders while he joked of river-travel. But continued disappointment brought back the old apprehensions.

Then Marden hit upon the idea of descending into a hole in the castle. Dussault held the rope, wondering what his partner was doing down there so long. Marden was, for a moment, beholding the hidden casket of gold and jewels and wondering whether he should go up empty-handed now—and next year return, alone. He scooped the gems from the ledge into the sack made from his extra breeches. He could leave all intact.

XIV

HE HAD enough on his mind now, he angrily told himself, without giving way to any such temptation. And he would come up all right—of course, he would come up. Yet, in spite of the stifling heat, the watcher sweat cold; he lay rigidly taut, as if the least relaxation on his part would loose catastrophe on his mate. When, presently, Marden looked up at him and spoke, he found it hard to rise.

"Stand by," said Marden. "I'm coming up."

"Got it all?" Dussault's voice was a dry croak.

"The whole layout. Get set. Take a grip on the rope with one hand and give me the other at the edge. Then haul hard. Say when."

Dussault took position, nervously wiped wet palms on breeches, clutched the rope midway between its stone anchorage and the brink, extended his right hand.

"All set," he grunted.

Marden, moving cautiously, had swung the heavy trouser-legs to his back and taken the belt in his teeth. Now, drawing a deep breath, he began ascent. With

Castle

Serial of Treasure Hunting up the Orinoco

the smooth speed of the skilled rope-climber he came, body unswaying, legs hanging straight and still, all strength and energy concentrated into the grip of steel-strong hands and the upward haul of muscular arms and shoulders. Up and up, without jerk or wrench, only fixed eyes and set jaws telling of the strain. Then a hand, black with the dust of the treasure-heap, left the rope and snatched at Dussault's waiting fingers, curved like talons.

The hands locked. Dussault heaved with all his weight and power—so suddenly and fiercely that Marden, instead of gradually sliding over the edge, shot up as if hurled out from below. Both men tumbled headlong and sprawled at the base of the stone spire. A few seconds they lay breathing hard—Marden from exertion, Dussault from tension. Then Marden pushed the deep-bitten belt up over his forehead, sat up, and laughing joyously, patted the treasure bags.

"Got it!" he triumphed. "Got it, in spite of the devil and all his devilkins! And now, Millionaire Dussault, shake hands with Millionaire Marden!"

ON THE shadowy side of a tall wafer of stone the disheveled treasure-hunters sat and gloated.

Before them on the black rock lay the tumbled heap of raw wealth wrested centuries ago from Indians of the western highlands, looted from a camp of wild soldiery, held to the death by desperate men, hidden by a cannibal in the Castle of the Devil, found at last by a man who dared dangle in the throat of an abyss. What a history it might relate if endowed with memory and a voice! Blood, torture, treachery, revenge, hate, fever, starvation, murder, insanity—all these, and perhaps unspeakable outrage as well, had evolved from this lifeless pile of uncut pebbles and unassayed mineral which, after all the agony it had caused, still abode in the wilderness, far from the moneyed marts where its value could be realized.

If all the sinister thought and malignant action to which it had given rise could be attributed to some noxious essence inherent in its mass, it must be potent even now to envenom the minds and bodies of the new owners, who ran their hands through it and weighed stone and nugget in their palms. But no such foreboding tempered their triumph. Instead, they rejoiced in the feel of the hard surfaces and visioned all luxuries in the green lights and yellow gleams.

At length their thoughts came back to practical actualities. To them this might be the most stupendous hour in all existence; an hour when the earth must halt, the sun remain fixed and all nature cease to move. But to the universe it was merely a passage of time, and the day was nearing its end, the night approaching, as on yesterday or tomorrow.

Wherefore Marden presently arose, squinted westward, and announced in a matter-of-fact tone—

"Well, Rafe, it's time for us to be bundling up our swag and moving it down to camp."

Dussault's eyes narrowed and his lips pursed thoughtfully. Rolling a big green stone absently between fingers and thumb, he sat peering eastward. After a moment of silence he shook his head.

"I don't think so, Jule," he differed. "This swag had better stay right up here until tomorrow. And I'm going to stay up here with it. That is, I'm going to sleep here."

"What for? Afraid the howlers will run us out of camp tonight?" Marden laughed. "They won't get a chance. We'll pull up the camp by the roots after supper and go while the going is good. A quiet sneak by moonlight will put us well down the river by morning—away from our inquisitive friends over by the Tetas."

"Not tonight." The objector's voice was firm. "There's no necessity for hurrying out, and no sense in working down that *caño* in the night. We can just as well get a good sleep tonight and break up camp in the cool of the morning; start downstream when we're ready, take it easy, and, if we think it best, wait near the mouth of the *caño*, in the woods, till night comes. Then it'll be simple to slide out to the river, and we can paddle half the night if we want to. Now we're both tired, and if we punish ourselves with more work we'll be all in before we reach the river, and then something may get the jump on us because we're too fagged to take notice in time."

Slowly Marden nodded, regarding him with some surprize. He had thought Dussault would be eager to leave this uncanny place without delay and put its shadowy terrors forever behind him. The sensible argument was, therefore, unexpected. Perhaps the solid actuality of the treasure had put to rout all the bodiless phantoms which hitherto had preyed on imagination. At any rate, there was no denying the good reasoning of his dissent. Nor had Marden any desire to dispute it; for he was very weary.

"Well, that suits me all right," he acquiesced, "although I think we're a couple of jassacks to climb back here instead of sleeping down below. But far be it from me to stand here and argue. I'm dying for a bath and a drink and some eats and a change of clothes, and we've got to go get 'em right now if we're coming back. Come on. Let the stuff lie right here. Nothing will touch it while we're gone."

With a final glance at the treasure he walked toward the gap. Dussault arose and took a few steps after him; slowed, stopped, and cast an uneasy look all around; resumed progress—then wheeled and returned. Squatting, he ran his hands once more through the heap, like a miser delighting in sensuous play with hoarded coins.

Marden plodded away without a backward look, disappearing among upthrust black juts. The yellow eyes of the man behind watched him go, then fell again to the mute yet eloquent wealth, rubbing his soiled hands, to dwell there through slow-moving seconds. As he gazed, his amber irises took on the hard yellowness of the gold, his black pupils the dark-green glow of the emeralds; his lips parted, and his teeth glinted in a half-grin, while on his swarthy face grew a light of rapacious lust. Dumb though that prize might be, yet in some insidious way it whispered to him, as it had whispered to Marden, down the shaft. And, for the moment, Dussault listened.

Then he started up and away from it as if his fingers had encountered something venomous. The green-gold eyes darkened with anger.

"Damn you!" he growled. And he strode away after his partner.

Marden, reaching the tree bridge, paused to look back along the shelf. Dussault was in sight, some distance behind, walking with hurried gait. The tall man grinned as he stepped out on the bough.

"Big kid!" he muttered. "Had to stop and play again with the new toy, didn't you? I'll bet you've got a stone or a nugget in every pocket, too, just to keep you company down below."

But this guess proved wrong when, down at the tent, Dussault emptied his pockets preparatory to exchanging his soiled clothes for garments drier and cleaner. Moreover, he did not even speak of their mutual fortune until Marden himself mentioned it. They bathed quickly, redressed and made supper with little talk, glancing now and then at the sinking sun. Then said Marden:

"We'd better take up the tent-bag to bring down the stuff in; then, tomorrow, pack it into one of the trunks, and keep it locked up until we're out of this country. Not a stone nor a nugget do we show till we're clear—"

"Oh, have a heart, Jule!" interposed the other, half scowling. "I've got to celebrate and relax at Ciudad Bolívar, if not sooner."

"Nothing doing! We have just about enough money to carry us to Trinidad. Then we'll have to cash in a stone or a little gold to replenish funds, and we can both go out on a good toot if we like; it'll be safe enough, because we'll be on English soil then. But here in Venezuela we're tonca bean scouts, and if we let anybody know what we've got the fat will be in the fire."

The stocky man was silent a moment, still scowling. Then he blurted:

"Oh hell, man! We can cash in one stone here—say we found it somewhere, and keep the rest of it dark—"

"Fat chance! They'll be on us like a flock of buzzards, and never let up till we're picked clean. I don't know what the law is down here, but I know what grafting officials and crooked judges are; and we'd be a fine pair of fools to give them the slightest hint that we've found anything at all. Forget it, Rafe! Where's all that self-control you were going to build up?"

Dussault flushed and swallowed his reply. A moment he squatted with smouldering gaze fixed on the embers. Then, abruptly, he arose.

"Got to get some dry cigarets," he said shortly. With that he walked into the tent.

Marden frowned after him, then glanced westward and picked up the dishes, with which he went to the creek. A hasty cleaning, and he returned with long steps. Inside he found Dussault, with cigaret aglow, beside his opened trunk and looking moodily down at its tumbled contents: Town clothes, cigaret packages, shaving tools, an empty silver flask, other personal odds and ends.

"We'll have to be climbing, Rafe."

"All right."

The trunk lid dropped, the key clicked, the owner stood up, proffering the freshly opened paper of Venezuelan *cigarrillos*. Marden took one. Then Dussault picked up coffee-pot and thermos bottle and moved to the coffee can.

"We'll eat here in the morning, Rafe," objected Marden. "No use wasting time on making coffee now."

"I want a drink, and there's nothing else in this dump," grumbled the other, dropping a handful of brown grains into the pot. Thereupon he stalked out to revive the fire and get water. Marden shrugged and folded up the strong tent-sack for use on the morrow; stepped out, and closed the flap.

"Come on when you're ready," he said. "I'm going now."

"She'll boil in a minute," responded the cook, without lifting his gaze from the fire-ringed pot. But when his companion had swung away he turned to watch him, then to gaze beyond him toward the somber Castillo. He was still staring in an unseeing way toward that weird block when the coffee boiled over; and his violent start at sound of the sharp hiss betrayed both absence of mind and recurrence of nerve tension.

Hastily he transferred the hot liquid to its bottle, corked it, screwed on the cup, and set it down; reentered the tent, and picked up a spare cup of enamelware;

then hesitated, eyes on his trunk. Suddenly he squatted again, unlocked the fiber case, rummaged hurriedly inside, and withdrew his hand, to slip some small article into a pocket. The lid fell once more, the lock snapped, and he jumped erect, snatching up the cup. Out he went at a run. As he hastened up the hill his lips were set in a hard line.

The sun had gone, but the sky still flamed with afterglow, and the light was good enough for the now familiar climb up the trees. By the time he had attained the shelf, however, dusk was thickening fast. A gusty wind had started up, too, cooling the stagnant air, but sweeping the narrow roadway with abrupt blows which might unbalance a careless pedestrian and hurl him off. Storm might lie somewhere behind that wind—the storm brewing throughout the oppressive afternoon—but it was not yet in sight. The threat of those sudden swoops of bodiless power, however, made Dussault walk with tense readiness. Once more at the safe gap, he drew a breath of relief as he turned inward.

At the top of the incline Marden waited, dark but distinct against the dulling sky.

"I've bagged the swag," he announced. "So let's get over to where we slept last night. It's as good a place as any, and the ponchos are still there. Watch your step."

He lifted to a shoulder the bag brought from camp, now well filled, and walked carefully away. Through the outcrops they picked their route to the spot where waited their ponchos. There the canvas sack was laid down as casually as if it contained only geological specimens.

"Well, here we are again," the bearer said, sitting. "Nothing to do till tomorrow, and another fine moonrise to admire, and then one gorgeous sleep. The only insect in the ointment is the chance of rain. Holy Moses! If it does rain we may lose the canoe! We never took down the rope."

An instant of blank silence. Then said Dussault:

"That's nothing to worry about. There'll be no rain here, I'll bet. Back in the mountains, perhaps, but not along the river. And there's no storm in sight anywhere yet. Besides, we have the light, and we can go down if we have to."

"Yes, that's true enough. Well, then, here goes for solid comfort! If anybody'd ever told me I could sleep as well on a rock as I have on this one I'd have called him crazy. We're getting to be tough as tripe. Do you want the bag of rocks for your downy pillow?"

"No, my head's not that hard." Dussault's teeth gleamed in the dimness. "We'll make it our mutual bedfellow; lay it between us, where nothing can get at it without our knowing it."

His tone was serious as he finished. Marden chuckled.

"Still seeing things, Rafe?" he bantered. "That man-eating Thing is the bunk, or we'd have met it before now. And it wouldn't eat this stuff anyway. The only thing we have to guard against is those scalawags at the Tetas—and not until we go out."

"Maybe."

Dussault looked uneasily around at the mysterious rock shapes looming near; then pulled the treasure-sack over to lie between the ponchos. When it was in position his hands still clung to it, squeezing at the lumps within. Gradually his eyes began to glow again. Marden lounged wordless, watching him, hearing only whispers of wind among the towers and queer calls borne from the woods. Dussault heard other voices.

For some time no word was spoken. At length Dussault desisted from his fondling, stood, and looked slowly all about, as if studying each motionless shape and reassuring himself of its lifelessness.

"They won't bite," smiled Marden.

His partner voiced a short laugh without mirth; then turned quickly to him.

"Say, Jule, you keep my gun tonight, will you?" he asked. "My nerves are rather on edge, and if I get to dreaming—or if you get up for anything— . Well, I don't want any accident. You take it."

He drew the weapon, reversed it, and held it out and down. Marden hesitated, then accepted it.

"Well, all right, if you'll feel better about it," he consented, sliding it into a pocket. Then, more warmly, "I'm glad you feel like trusting me with it, old man. Not many fellows would disarm themselves, I'm thinking, with this stuff lying here and a man with a gun on the other side of it."

"I wouldn't do it either, with anybody else."

He turned away, took a few short, nervous steps, and turned again. A sudden clink and scrape sounded. A foot had struck the empty cup.

"Humph! Guess that's what I need," he exclaimed. "I was forgetting my drink after fetching it all the way up here. Have one with me, Jule—a coffee highball to luck! Pretty poor stuff for two tough-as-tripe millionaires to have to drink to themselves in, eh? But I'll give you a promise with it; I'll drink nothing stronger until we're in Trinidad, if you'll promise to go out on a regular racket with me then. How about it?"

"It's a go," promptly agreed the lounger. "Fill her up!"

Dussault was already unscrewing the bottle cup. When the cork was drawn he began pouring. A second later the cup dropped and he blew violently on his fingers.

"Ouch! The devil!" he ejaculated. "Hotter than the devil!"

"Naturally," laughed Marden. "It's fresh from the fire."

"I ought to know it," ruefully admitted the cook. "We'll have to let it cool. Where's that cup gone?"

Nearly invisible among the stones, he went stooping about until he found the receptacle. Then he poured again, more carefully; and, letting the bottle stand, took the other cup to it and filled that also.

"About a minute in this wind and it will be drinkable," he promised, recorking the bottle. After an interval of waiting he approached and tendered the larger cup.

"Here's luck!" He lifted his own drink. "Luck to us and our baby doll here. Down the hatch!"

He gulped his own stimulant noisily. More slowly, but steadily, Marden drained his cup. Then he accepted another cigaret and a light from a skilfully shielded match. In the flare of flame Dussault eyed him keenly. Then he ignited a smoke of his own, stood, stretched, and yawned.

"Ho, hum! That just hits my sleepy spot," he declared. "I think I'll lie down and keep quiet awhile. The moon ought to be coming along soon, and then I can snooze in peace. Good night, if you happen to drop off before I do."

"'Night, old chap."

Both lay at ease, the bag resting within touch of either man, but neither touching it. Both smoked contemplatively, looking eastward through lids half closed. Both finished their cigarets, tossed the butts aside, and thereafter lay quiet. Dussault's eyes remained fixed, looking at something far distant, visible only to himself. Marden's drooped, closed, reopened, slowly closed again. Sluggishly he turned on one side, facing the bag. Once more his lids fluttered, tried to lift, failed. The moon was—a long—time—coming—

XV

THE MOON was up. So was Dussault. An hour high, the lopsided lamp of the sky looked wanly down through a thin film of haze, casting a pale light, lacking the clarity of that shed during the nights just past, yet strong enough to afford ease of vision and freedom of motion to wakeful creatures below. Moreover, it revealed a tall black wall of cloud which had stealthily risen at the southward, seemingly solid and motionless as a mountain range, but pierced now and again by flares and streaks of lightning.

Down there—and not very far down—a fierce storm raged among the lofty peaks which by day were dim blue; and from it sounded occasional dull mutters of

thunder, faintly heard through the contrary wind, but unmistakable. If that tempest should take a sudden stride nearer, the Castle of the Devil might become truly infernal in the elemental fury of fire and flood.

It was not this possibility, however, which had aroused the man now sitting up. Indeed, nothing had waked him; for he had not slept. His eyes hung a few minutes on that hovering wall, gaging its distance. Then they reverted to the bag beside him, and, beyond that, to the inert face and form of his partner. Presently he spoke.

"Jule," he said, in quiet tone. Then, louder— "Jule!"

Julian made no movement. A third time, more loudly, the other called. Then he leaned across the bag and laid hand on a slack shoulder. No response came. The hand withdrew, and a satisfied chuckle sounded.

Both hands now moved to the strongly corded throat of the bag. They loosed its bonds, slid within, emerged full of emeralds and gold. Another double handful followed, and another, to lie strewn on the cloth side of the poncho. And then, for a long time, while the moon rose steadily higher but the storm remained fixed at the south, the sleepless man played like a child with his toys.

He rolled nuggets along to see them glimmer and shine; snapped stone against gold with a finger to hear the click; shook both in his cupped palms and listened to the dry rattle. He even smelled at them, as if detecting a faint, pleasing fragrance, and put an emerald into his mouth to warm upon his tongue. Every physical sense pandered to mental joy of possession, while imagination depicted scenes of Sybaritic luxury and revelry far beyond the seas, all procurable with the wealth encompassed by this one canvas sack.

Paris—Monte Carlo—the Riviera—Japan—Tahiti—all these, and many other exotic visions, flitted before him as he squatted there amid the leering demons of stone, as if the sorcerer who had created those uncanny shapes were now at work painting mirages.

At length, however, the exaltation faded from the dilated eyes, which contracted to normal size and fixed themselves once more on the pleasant countenance of the sleeper. The hands, too, contracted, clutching hard at the solid substances they held. Then they relaxed and hesitantly moved to the open mouth of the bag; hovered there—then cast their contents back inside. With decisive movements they scooped up the other playthings and returned them also; took the wet stone from the whiskered mouth and snapped it after its mates; drew the cord tight, knotted it firmly. Then Dussault arose and turned his back on his temptation.

Head high, jaw set, hairy chest exposed by unbuttoned shirt to the erratic wind, he stood frowning at the storm-cloud and the towers, seeing none of them. Instead he saw himself sliding helpless to death in the *caño*, and his partner snatching him back. He saw that partner discovering the way to ascend this block; doggedly hunting with him through weary hours; sliding over the brink of the shaft, hanging in air, climbing back hand over hand with the load which made them both rich.

Suddenly he shook his head and turned toward the thermos bottle a few feet away. Stepping to it, he uncorked it and drank off the remaining cupful of hot coffee, glowering meanwhile at the stone shapes which seemed ceaselessly observant.

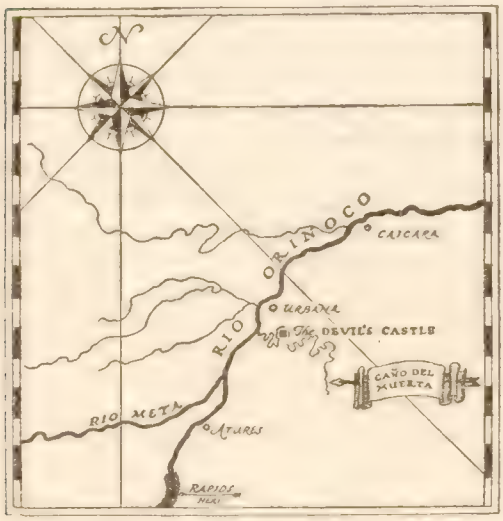
Setting down the empty container, he glanced at the unmoved Marden, then drew from a pocket another bottle. A small, plain drug-store bottle, this was, minus a label. This also he uncorked, but only to smell at it; for in it now remained only an odor. After a sniff or two he moved again to Marden's side, where he lifted the capacious cup whence his companion had drunk to luck and a promise. A long smell at this, and he set it down with a satisfied grunt. His gaze rested on the butt of his own revolver

protruding from the sleeper's pocket. Softly he chuckled.

"A dirty trick, Jule," he said quietly. "Beware of the man who takes off his gun to insure your confidence. He may have a knife in his boot. And when a man tells you a bottle is empty he may be a liar. But it doesn't matter this time. I'm not going through with it."

With that he returned to his own place, lay down with his back to the bag, and resolutely closed his eyes.

The cloud loomed nearer, though its lightnings lessened. The wind opposing its advance was shifting slightly but maintaining its forceful assaults. Among the towers it kept up its eerie whisperings,



mingled with tones strangely like mutterings and snickerings of invisible men. Ghost voices, they seemed, counseling the mortal who lay shut-eyed but open-eared to carry out his plan, deriding his faint heartedness, mouthing encouragement, anger, contempt. After a time his eyes reopened, to sweep around and then rest on the imminent cloud. Abruptly he turned over, once more facing the bag.

More time passed. A hairy arm moved to the sack, the hand closing on the knobs bulging the cloth. Slowly that hand went up and down, squeezing here and there, while the gaze of the wakeful man dwelt vacantly on its unchanging shape. Visions flooded his brain again, and the wind-voices insistently whispered, cajoled, sneered, swore. At length he rose on an elbow, still gripping at the treasure, still staring at something in his mind. Involuntarily he lifted himself higher yet, to his knees; then, swiftly, to his feet.

"I've got to have it, Jule!" he hoarsely asserted. "All of it! It's mine, I tell you! The old man left it here—for *me!* It's all mine—I've got to have all of it—I've got to! And, by God, I will!"

The yellow eyes gleamed now with unholy light, fixed on something beyond the man he addressed, beyond even the Castillo. Marden lay unheeding. The wind-voices suddenly whooped among the demons in gratulatory mirth, then fell silent. From the cloud wall rumbled a heavy bass note, as if there, too, a huge spirit of malevolence chuckled.

Dussault, half crouching, straightened up, stiffening with sudden sinister change. Hard-eyed, hard-mouthed, hard-fisted, he had become all at once a ruthless, reckless reembodiment of a man long vanished into the mists of time. Defiant, truculent, he looked coldly at Marden, the bag, the demons of the castle, and the moon. That moon now was high enough to light his way along the shelf and the bough bridge. With a long stride and a quick stoop he drew his revolver from Marden's pocket and holstered it; took the other gun, too, and kept it in hand. Then he hoisted the bag to a shoulder and walked sturdily away.

After a few steps, though, he halted, looking down at the stolen weapon. A short pause, while the wind whispered softly again; a jerky headshake of refusal; then he set down the bag and turned back. Straight to Marden he went, and into the holster he slid the gun. Thereafter he folded the open poncho over the recumbent form, to protect it from chill or wet.

"*Adios, amigo,*" he said calmly. "And good luck! You'll never understand, but that can't be helped."

With that farewell he walked again to the bag, and turned his head no more.

METHODICALLY he picked his way to the mouth of the pit, where the rope still hung over the edge. Without a tremor he gazed down into the hollow blackness which had made him quake in daylight, and without hesitation he pulled up the rope, then cut it, and, with a long piece, made a looping pack-cord with which to sling his load securely on his back.

When the bag hung fast from his shoulders he trudged to the gap, carefully descended to the shelf, and, unhurried, trod the narrow path with steady pace. The wind, as if to aid, held its breath. Without misstep or mishap he reached the branch and walked coolly along it to the trunk of the tree.

Here it was dark, very dark, the moon cut off by the dense foliage. Yet the faint light stealing in among the branches, coupled with familiarity and unflagging care to his footing, enabled him to find his way safely down. It was slow work, however, and the ropes cut cruelly into his unaccustomed shoulders. Near the bottom he was grunting from pain and strain; and the moment he touched ground he fought himself clear from the clutch of the torturing cords, dropping the bag with a sullen thump.

For a few minutes he rested, meanwhile watching all about. No menace showed. Nothing moved or made a sound. Nor did he fear anything, real or fancied. All fear, all fancy had departed from him as if blown away on the winds above, or displaced by the spirit of that grim ancestor whose hard hands had won this treasure. The vigilance he now maintained was instinctive, as with the earliest man to walk the earth by night. When he arose and moved on through the woods his step was confident, but like the prehistoric prowler, he carried his weapon ready. The bag, divested of its rope, now rode balanced on his left shoulder, and his right hand swung free, curled about the butt of the drawn gun.

Out in the open all was still. Nowhere moved any shape or shadow, and from nowhere came any noise. The world seemed hushed in sleep. Only at the south was the slightest sound, and this so faint as to be almost inaudible; no mumble of thunder, but a steady low murmur as of torrential but distant rain. Glancing aloft, Dussault found the black bulk of cloud even taller than before, nearer to the moon, yet apparently motionless. He grinned at it, unperturbed; for he knew that just across the Orinoco began the great *llanos*—plains—and that at this season many a mountain-born storm might advance almost to the river's edge, then falter and halt or swing back upon itself, not crossing the master stream.

Even if the present threat should materialize and the moon vanish awhile, he had only to wait in the tent until it reappeared; the night still was young. But he felt that same curious confidence that all would go well. He was afraid of nothing now.

So he reached the trees about the camp and trudged in among them, peering through the mingled lights and shadows toward the tent. Here, as elsewhere, the ground was empty. The tent itself stood wan and ghostly in the shade, its flap shut, as when he had left. In a small patch of moonlight near it, the coffee-pot stood beside the ashes of the fire. With a reminiscent chuckle he kicked it over as he passed.

Before the closed doorway he let down his bag, glanced around again, transferred the gun to his left hand, and rubbed the shoulder which had borne the burden. His eyes came to rest on the upset coffee-pot, then rose toward the now invisible Castillo, masked by the intervening trees, yet as clear in his mind as if vision were unobstructed. And he laughed; not his usual subdued laugh, but deep-chested mirth compounded of triumph and mockery. Thus had the Dussault of Tampa laughed sometimes when a not-too-honest deal had been consummated. And thus had his cannibal ancestor laughed, perhaps, when he stood sole survivor of all his desperate company.

Still rubbing his shoulder, he ambled

around the corner to assure himself of the safety of the canoe, preparatory to loading it with treasure and personal equipment. Half a dozen steps he took, and then—

With paralyzing speed death struck.

A huge, mighty body hurled itself on him and clutched him, jamming his arms tight to his ribs, twisting his torso far around, crushing him down with terrible weight and power, dazing his brain with the horror of its assault. A frightful head rose above his own; merciless eyes blazed down at him. One stunned look at it—then he fought madly to free his gun hand, unaware that already his weapon had fallen from his benumbed grip. His brief struggle was of no more avail than the flutter of an eyelid. The grasp of the monster tightened. From him burst a scream of ghastly fear and utter despair.

"Jule! Jule!"

That call of mortal agony sped through the stillness to echo among the towers of the Devil's Castle and strike upon the ears of the lone man lying there—only to find them deaf. Julian slept on; the imperturbable sleep of the drugged.

Then the cloud crept over the moon.

XVI

MARDEN awoke cold and wet, with a hollow thunder beating at his ears.

Day had come. The sun peered at him from the crest of the low ridge at the east, bathing him with early heat; but still he was cold. His hair was wet, his feet were wet, and so was an arm which had lain outside the poncho. The stones glistened with water as yet undried. Rain had fallen—not a hard rain, for no pools had collected; but enough to bathe the whole top lightly and dampen exposed flesh thoroughly. And now from some place near-by rolled that angry roar.

He sat up, shivering, somewhat thick-brained, still heavy with sleep. Then his eyes dilated, his jaw dropped, and a dull shock smote him. Petrified, he stared at the blank space and the empty poncho where had lain the bag and Dussault.

The shock passed, giving way to a stab of startled consciousness now fully awake. He scrambled to his feet, to throw swift glances all about, then stand a minute looking at the vestiges of Dussault's presence. There was the coffee bottle, its cup unscrewed; the open poncho, its cloth uniformly wet; the cup from which he, Marden, had drunk; his helmet; and that was all. No, not quite all. On Dussault's poncho lay a small glass bottle which might have slipped from his pocket. For the moment, though, it meant nothing to the beholder. He sought a bloodstain on that drab cloth, some other sign of violence. What thing had snatched one man and a treasure bodily hence, while leaving the other man unharmed and unaroused?

Rafe's helmet was gone, too. That was queer. He wouldn't wear that while sleeping. He wouldn't wear it at night anyway—unless he were going—

Suddenly the thinker darted a hand to the pocket into which he had put Dussault's weapon. Then he felt all other pockets to make sure there was no mistake, and looked at his own backflung poncho. The gun might have slipped out. But it hadn't. It was gone. A quick glance assured him that his own was still in place. His eyes fell again on the glass bottle.

He stepped, swooped, pulled the cork, smelled. His face paled. Blankly he stared at his cup.

"My God!" he muttered.

At the time when Dussault drugged the tea for Ramón and his men, Marden had caught a vagrant whiff of the soporific as it was slyly measured into the pot, a faint odor, hardly perceptible then, and indistinguishable afterward. But he recognized it now. And again he saw his partner, dim in the dusk, squatting to windward last night as he poured coffee; remember, too, the interval of cooling, during which any odor emanating from his own cup could dissipate. His head drooped, and for an instant he swayed, sickened physically and mentally. Then, with sudden violence, he hurled the bottle to smash on the stone.

"You damn double-crosser!" he swore, turning his hard-set face eastward. "I'll run you down if it takes the rest of my life!"

He strode to the edge of the block and peered beneath a shading hand toward the camp. As he caught sight of the half-concealed tent his brows lifted in surprize; for he had expected to find that this too had vanished. But then, realizing that the fugitive who abandoned poncho and thermos would hardly bother to strike the tent, he turned his gaze to the empty creek. At once he observed that it was considerably higher than it had been. The rain last night, though light here, had been much heavier a few miles inland, and now the erstwhile stony waterway was up several feet, its obstructions submerged. The devils of this region had connived in the robbery and escape, affording the thief an easy getaway.

Scowling, he returned to his bed, and mechanically he folded both ponchos, donned his helmet, and picked up cup and bottle. Toward that compelling roar he then walked, seeking its source. It was soon found. From the harsh throat of the pit it rose, almost deafening him as he stood at the brink. Yet, looking down, he could see no cause for it.

Save that the walls were wet from the bygone rain, all was as it had been at sundown, except that the rope had vanished. This he quickly noticed, and his eye went to the stone spire where the knotted end still was in place. The clean-cut extremity of the remaining length of cable told its tale of knife work, and a moment of thought deduced the use to which the missing section had been put.

He walked away, but paused to look back at the thundering cavity, part of his mind demanding a reason for the noise. Automatically the rise of the *caño* recurred to him, and then the voice of Ramón:

"After a heavy rain he is heard most often. The devil does not like to be wet."

He nodded shortly, comprehending now the cause of the devil's growl. There was that tunnel at the rear, opening a few feet above low water level, terminating at an inner precipice, far below which lay a hidden pool. Heavy rain, raising the creek to a certain height, would cause water to flow into that clean-swept hole, where it must fall at the end to echoing depths; and its roar would rise, as it now rose, through the vertical shaft to the roof, thence to resound abroad as a hollow growl, subdued by distance.

At high flood, on the other hand, there would be no sound, for then both tunnel and pit would be choked by such volume of water that its subterranean outlet—wherever that might be—could not cope with the inflow. Thus the demoniac voice could speak only when the water was neither too low nor too high, without and within.

Such was the logical explanation of the phenomenon. But on its heels trod a thought, illogical but disturbing. This demon of the castle had growled when those men Rodolfo and Moisé came in—and they had never gone out. It was growling again now—and had Dussault gone out?

Without further thought or delay he hurried to the shelf and down to the ground. There he paused briefly to look at the discarded rope; then strode campward. Paradoxically his wrath against the traitor was giving way to a growing anxiety for his welfare, though his determination to run Dussault down remained unabated. Until he himself could overtake the betrayer of friendship and exact heavy penalty he wished no ill fate to befall him.

LIKE the man whom he followed, he headed first for the tent, gun drawn. But, unlike him, he halted short before reaching it, to stand agape. There on the earth near the closed flap lay the treasure bag.

Its rotundity, its knotted cord at the throat, proved it unemptied. He stared at it, and at the blank tent-end, listening. No sound came, save the soft rustle of leaves in a light breeze. With sudden long strides he passed to the tent and

threw aside its flap—then stopped again. Everything within was undisturbed. Dussault's trunk and work clothes and all else were there. But of Dussault himself there was no sign.

Turning away, he swung around the corner and toward the creek, and stopped a third time. A few feet away from the cloth wall lay a helmet. Near it, in a small spot of sunlight, dully gleamed a blue revolver. Between the two, distinct despite the dampness of the yellowish soil, was a large splotch of dark red.

That was all. Not another trace of the vanished man remained. Like Rodolfo and Moisé, he had been utterly swallowed up by that dire thing which came from nowhere, went nowhere, was not, yet was.

For minutes Marden stood rigid, white-lipped, looking from hat to gun, from gun to stain, and thence to gun and hat and back again. At length his frozen blood moved once more through his veins and motion returned to his muscles. Slowly he turned his head, searching all the adjacent ground and the near trees, trunk and branch. Stiffly he stalked to the revolver, squatted, and swung out its cylinder. The undented copper primers within the brass cartridge-heads testified to the suddenness of the overwhelming attack. He clicked the weapon shut, arose and moved on toward the *caño*.

There was no use in looking for the dugout, he knew; the rising flood must have carried it away. And so it had. Where the ugly craft had lain was blank water, flowing silently, thick with sediment borne from the distant hills. But that water, perhaps five feet higher than it had been, still did not fill the banks; and at the edge he found something else. In the crumbly soil was a broad depression where a heavy body had been dragged—or dragged itself—over the verge and down the slope. That was the last sign of the passing of Dussault.

FOR A time Marden stood surveying this. Then he walked along the shore for some distance, both up and down the stream, tensely alert, but finding nothing. One spot at which he paused was not far from the tent, where a long smooth face of stone slanted at an easy grade into the flowing waters. Up or down that stone, something told him, almost any creature could pass without leaving trace, except a wet track, quickly dried, or dust from the soil beyond, virtually indistinguishable. Perhaps the Thing had made use of this in stealing to the camp—if that Thing had come from the *caño*.

Hard-eyed, he looked along that inscrutable stream, up and down, seeing only bits of flotsam, yet glimpsing the possible shape of the man-killing monster. Then he moved on, aimlessly, until he felt the uselessness of further search and returned to the camp.

There he stood awhile, looking down at the treasure bag, then drifted back to the dark spot beside the tent. Longer still he stood there, gazing soberly down, while through his mind passed many memories.

Odd slynesses and strange moods of the man now dead came back to him, along with his terrors of shadows and courage against realities—fears rooted in ancestral crimes ten generations gone, intrepidity also a heritage from adventurous forebears, as well as headstrong appetites and passions generated long before he or his father or his father's father was born. At length he spoke in musing tone:

"'Twas my fault as much as yours, Rafe. You couldn't help it, I guess. It was in your blood. It was in the feel of those cursed stones. It was in the air of this damn place. And, knowing you as I did, I should have known you couldn't stand the strain and been more on my guard. You brought me down here to take care of you, and when the pinch came I didn't even take care of myself. Yes, it was a good deal my own fault.

"You weren't a bad egg at all. You could have pitched me down the hole up there last night if you'd been that kind, or knifed me or shot me and left me for the buzzards. You didn't even take my gun. No, you were a good skate, Rafe, considering everything. That old damn of

an ancestor of yours made you do this, I bet. And he killed you by doing it, the old skunk! I wonder if he knew! I wonder!"

He looked again toward the *caño*, his face hardening once more. And again he spoke, his voice now loud and harsh.

"You! Listen to me, you damn murderer! Your work's not done yet! Not half done! Your bloody treasure's still here, and I'm here! You come back tonight and clean up! I'll be right here waiting for you!"

XVII

THE SURVIVING member of the expedition ate nothing that morning. But he made coffee, very strong, and quaffed three cups of it. With the third, tardily remembering the wet chill with which he had awaked, he took several grains of quinine. Thereafter, for a time, he gloomily smoked and ruminated.

At length he lifted the bag and pitched it roughly inside the tent, to fall where it might. Temporarily, at least, all pleasure in its possession had departed. Later, its allurement and its luxurious visions might revive, but now it was merely a burden of stones and mineral to be borne away and sold for what it might bring. After it thudded on the floor he gave it a kick and turned from it.

Deliberately he undressed. Experimenting with a large handkerchief, he formed a hood; placed his revolver under it, resting on the crown of his head; knotted the ends tight beneath his jaw. When the arrangement suited him he walked out naked, heedless of sun and mosquitoes, and down the *caño* to a point not far above the inlet where he and Dussault had camped during their first night up here. Now the depression was under two or three feet of water; but that fact was providential for his purpose. At the chosen spot he hesitated briefly, eying the murky flow. Then, mouth tight, he let himself down into it.

Head high, arms working in fast breast strokes, he swam across, borne down by the current to the entrance of the bywater. There he caught footing and began walking inland, hip deep, hands meanwhile pulling off the hood and releasing the gun, which he gripped ready for use. After a few sloshing strides he turned sharp to the shore, mastered by distrust of the opaque liquid in which might lurk menace. Up the bank he clambered, and along its top he picked his way toward the last camp of the pair who had come in but never gone out.

The distance seemed redoubled, since he must needs travel slowly and deviate to avoid numerous thorny growths. At length, however, he reached the ruined hut of the lost men. Carefully he surveyed everything alow and aloft; then he laid his weapon on a flat stone at the edge of the bank and slid down to the slant-lying canoe. More minutely than on his previous visit, he inspected it for cracks. Except for small surface slits at bow and stern, he found none.

This was a far better craft than Ramón's slovenly dingey; skilfully constructed from a log of some dense tropical wood, almost as durable as stone—and almost as heavy. A tentative lift at its bow evoked from him a gasp of effort, and resulted in hardly any movement of the ponderous shell. But he smiled at it, well pleased by its solidity. It would be a stanch river-boat.

Back he climbed, to wrestle a few minutes with the hard-drawn knot of the rope which still faithfully tethered its charge to the tree. So firm was it that he could not loose it. But then, remembering the rusty machete at the hut, he went and got it, as well as the better of the two wormy paddles. The steel blade was brittle from oxidation, but it served to saw the cable asunder. With the snapping of the strands the canoe settled, and, slid a foot or two by its own weight. When he followed and gave it a shove, it rolled over and down without further resistance, smacking into the water on a beam end, then floating sluggishly, half full.

Tying it to a snag, he stepped in and

swept out most of the water by rapid swings of the broad paddle. Then, retrieving his gun and binding it on his head as before—lest he might again have to swim—he took position amidships and stroked creekward, steadily picking up speed. Out into the flow he surged with strong momentum, and across the current he plowed with little lateral drift.

On the very last stroke the weakened paddle-shaft quietly broke under his lower hand, promptly floating away downstream. He caught up the rope and sprang ashore. Thereafter he hauled his boat up through the shore eddies to the camp, where he tied it to the same tree which had first moored the curial of Ramón.

"Now," said he, with a grim look along the *caño*, "if you need a marker to locate this place tonight, you killer, here it is."

With that he returned to the tent to don his clothes, smoke again, and cogitate. Repeatedly he looked about him, estimating the amount of work to be done in breaking camp. Practical sense told him to go at it, to load up his boat and get away while fortune favored him; for the present high level of the water could not endure through the day; in fact, signs of slight recession had already become evident along shore.

But the promptings of reason were beaten back by the mocking rumble of the castle demon and by his uncompromising determination to await the return of that thing which had done away with Rafe. That it would return he felt little doubt. And this time, he vowed, it would not go away.

But, though resolved to wait, he could not remain idle. Both mind and body needed something to do. So, presently, after contemplating the treasure bag, he set himself at a queer task. Taking the sack outside, he dumped its contents on a poncho. In the light camp-kettle he brought water from the stream. Then he kindled a fire and, renewing the water from time to time, boiled every nugget and stone.

"There," he said at the end. "Now you're clean!"

The richer hue of the emeralds, the brighter gleam of the gold testified to the efficacy of the cleansing. Not only the fine dust of centuries was cleared away, but the impalpable film left by the clutches of men—that enduring trace of human handling which may still cling to smooth surfaces even after long burial.

Gone now was every vestige of the contact of the white cannibal and all his rapacious fellows; gone, too, perhaps, infinitesimal stains of human blood which at one time or another might have gushed over the hard-bought prizes or been imprinted thereon by red fingers. Gone, too, for that matter, were the recent adherences from the avaricious hands of Dussault, though this fact did not at once occur to the mind of the cleanser.

Instead, as he eyed the embryo jewels, he recalled his late partner's chance admission that emeralds had always brought him evil luck. Now, in view of his final fate, the bad fortune attendant upon his possession of green gems seemed not coincidental but predestined—the working out of a curse on the eater of men and on his descendants, even unto the tenth generation.

Dussault had feared supernatural vengeance, Marden now knew. Again he saw the horror with which the Latin had recoiled from the unearthed bones, heard his half-intelligible disclaimer of personal guilt and his cry that the spot was accursed. Again, too, he witnessed—and for the first time understood—the sudden terror of his comrade in the tunnel, when he had confessed to fright at a shadow. That confession had been merely a subterfuge to cover a more grisly fear aroused by Marden's careless suggestion:

"All these bad actors are the spirits of the old die-hards—still sticking—waiting for that old cannibal to come back in another body, so they can get him—"

Yes, Dussault had feared that very thing, knowing that he was in some degree a reembodiment of that ancient murderer. But he had carried on, in the

teeth of the grimacing specter which sometimes unmanned him but could not drive him out. There was a dogged bravery in that persistence, far more admirable than mere fearlessness; for lack of fear might be due simply to lack of imagination. Yet, when his dread was so strong that it drove him to take refuge atop the Devil's Castle, how had he dared come down off it last night, with the stones which he knew always to bring malign fortune?

Some stronger influence must have moved him; something outside himself or, perhaps, inside himself; something hereditary which suddenly seized control of his brain and banished all else; something insane.

There Marden shook off his thoughts and busied himself again with work. He refilled the bag, carried it inside, unlocked and emptied his trunk, and carefully packed away the entire treasure, fitting its component parts snugly against one another until it lay in compact mass. Then he topped it with whatever else could be laid in; jammed down the lid, and locked the case—to open it no more until he must.

So came noon, and he ate, finding his appetite now good. As he finished the meal he noted that the growl of the Castillo had diminished to a low grumble. Soon thereafter it died out. Without looking, he knew the *caño* surface had receded considerably and thenceforth would drop fast.

With the end of that noise the place became very quiet. The hot, still hours of the day had come, during which virtually everything took shelter and siesta. For awhile Marden found occupation in putting various things in order, including himself. For the first time since leaving the sailing boat, he shaved, noting with surprize how dark and thin his face had grown—a brown, taut-skinned, hollow-cheeked and hollow-eyed visage which hardly seemed the one he had possessed on the *piragua*, and certainly was not that of the Marden of Tampa.

"You look as if you'd been to hell and back," he told his mirrored image, after washing. A moment later he added, "And so you have—only you're not back yet."

Then he yawned, stepped to the doorway and looked around. Silence and heat reigned. He closed one side of the opening. With a few dishes he constructed in the other space a small pile which, if anything attempted entrance, must fall with a warning clatter. Then, in preparation for a vigil in the coming night, he lay down and calmly slept.

XVIII

SUNSET was perhaps an hour in the future when the eyes of the sleeper reopened.

The improvised danger-signal in the doorway stood silent, still preserving its precarious balance. Somewhere high in the sky rasped the screams of macaws winging roostward from distant feeding grounds. Somewhere back in the labyrinth yelped a pair of toucans. Near at hand fluttered leaves swept by reviving breeze. No other sounds came.

Marden stood, stretched arms wide, breathed deeply, moved silently to the opening and looked out; stepped carefully over his alarm-pile, and circuited the tent, eyes vigilant. Then he walked to the *caño*, finding it shrunken to its normal dry-time shallowness. The canoe lay half stranded on a stone. He descended, shoved it clear, then retraced his steps and prepared supper.

While he ate he speculatively surveyed the trees close by, his gaze repeatedly resting on one stout branch. Some fifteen feet up, this bough extended over the tent. Beneath it were no other limbs. The trunk of its parent tree, although corpulent, was not too thick to be climbed by a man with long arms and legs. As he finished his coffee—doubly strong—he nodded with decision.

Into the tent he went, to emerge with hammock, electric torch and both revolvers. Firmly he secured the flap. Then, with one hammock loop caught under his belt, one gun holstered and the

other and the torch pocketed, he strode to the selected tree and began climbing. The trailing net dragged behind as he walked, and crept slowly up after him as he ascended.

Reaching the branch, he drew up the dangling bed, draped it over the wood, and sat a minute, resting. Then he hitched himself outward a few feet and lashed one end below the bough; moved on, carrying the other loop, until the hammock was drawn nearly taut; tied that end also. When sure of its fastening he crept back a little, opened the net, and let himself down into it.

Now he had a snug nest, high above ground, wherein he could lie all night, if necessary, without discomfort. Moreover, he had an unobstructed view of virtually the entire camp. The wide spaces between the crisscross cords of the net which, like most Orinocan hammocks, was of the type known as *chinchorro*—fish-seine—enabled him to see straight downward without putting his head over the edge, if he wished to lie motionless; also to aim and shoot through the interstices. If he should find it preferable to sit up or lean over the edge for greater freedom of vision or motion, he needed only to catch the overhead limb with one hand in order to insure steadiness.

In all, it was far better arrangement for a vigil of unknown length than huddling on the bough at the crotch. And there was little chance that the comfort of his position would cause him to fall asleep. The long siesta, the overstrong coffee and the inflexible resolution to avenge his lost partner would keep him fully conscious.

So, as the sun vanished, he lay there watching. His right hand loosely grasped Dussault's revolver, reloaded with cartridges fresh from the box. His left curled lightly over the barrel of the torch, which he now had leashed by a long light cord to his belt, as positive precaution against loss. His own gun, also newly refilled, rested ready in its holster, for reserve use only. The squaring of Rafe's account, he felt, was fitting work for the weapon which had been powerless to defend him.

Yet, when dense darkness had obliterated nearly everything and made all else mysteriously vague, some primitive part of his mind asked him whether that malignant Thing could be destroyed by bullets; whether it were not something deathless, eternally evil, immune to all attack by human inventions. Perhaps, said that ages-old inner man, the Thing inhabited a monstrous fleshly body; indeed, it must, in order to overpower and annihilate an armed man; but, if that body were vulnerable and mortal, might not the Thing merely quit it at will, leaving behind only an empty carcass, and straightway enter into a new one, its essence unharmed and its malevolence unabated? Who knew?

He frowned and shook his head, striving to banish such thoughts. He was here to kill that Thing; and he would kill it, so that it would be utterly and everlastingly dead. If he allowed paganistic beliefs of this sort to take possession of his mind, then his vengeance must prove abortive; as futile as demolishing the temporary dwelling of an enemy while the foe slipped away uninjured. Rank superstition! He moved impatiently and forced his brain to concentrate on the various small sounds of the night. They were few, natural and distant. He turned on his light and sent it sweeping all the near ground. Nothing was there. Cutting it off, he lay again in the dark. Forthwith the forbidden thoughts flowed again.

Yes, who knew? Who knew what was the inner spirit of any body, whence it came, whither it went, how many corporeal shapes it inhabited, where it eventually ended, or whether it ever did end its existence? Scientists and clergy might assert this or that, acridly combat one another, lead sects of sheep-headed believers in their various trains—and prove nothing whatever.

Perhaps all modern dogmas were fallacies, and the ancient doctrine of transmigration the truth. Perhaps his own inopportune jest in the tunnel, which had so shaken Dussault, was also truth.

Perhaps the souls, or spirits, or lives—whatever one might call them—released from the diseased or murdered flesh of men hereabouts had gone into the next-born bodies of the region, which must necessarily be those of beasts or birds or reptiles, and, through generations short or long, had perpetuated themselves, waiting—waiting—

There was that big electric eel which had swum stealthily to attack Dussault. It had not touched Marden, although Marden's frame was longer and his feet farther out and consequently nearer to the assailant. And there was the jaguar which had made tentative efforts to dig in under the tent walls. Now that the thinker harked back, he remembered that the pawings had all been on Dussault's side of the cloth house. Yes, and the tracks betraying pauses to listen, and perhaps to think—all those, too, had been on that side!

And that blue snake in the tunnel—that had come in answer to Rafe's rough tones. And, living over that swift incident in unhurried retrospect, the survivor now saw that vindictive streak sliding toward Rafe's feet, not his own. Moreover, he saw its shattered, shuddering body lying with eyes still fixed with inextinguishable hate on the descendant of the white cannibal. And after that he reviewed his mate's odd glee over his acquisition of the skin of that venomous thing. A souvenir, he had said. Yet, was his satisfaction perhaps based on some instinctive perception that this was no mere ophidian foe, but a far more ancient enemy striking in long-awaited vengeance?

Marden stirred again, this time shaking off a clammy chill, endeavoring also to break the chain of thought, forming link by link. But, after another interval of futile listening in the shapeless gloom, he found another link growing. Those monkeys which had invaded the tent—had they been monkeys? There was no evidence; nothing but the fortuitous noise of a howler and Dussault's glad jump to a conclusion. Would not monkeys have carried off something? Some small shiny object such as spoon or dish—they would have carried that outside, at least.

No, the intruders—or the single intruder—had not been simian, he now felt. The disorder had been caused by something larger, heavier, fiercer, which had crept in, found the place empty of prey, and upset inanimate objects in sullen anger. And the next night it had waited outside, disturbing nothing within. And that time it had gotten Rafe.

Another chill. Again he looked around, finger on the switch of his tube, but withholding pressure. Would the moon never rise? He had been here for hours—or so it seemed—and still no light showed through the eastern branches. Twice his finger stiffened to press on the button controlling the white ray. Twice, for no comprehensible reason, it stopped a shade short. Something counseled him to wait in darkness.

Below, a ghostly blur amid the black, vaguely showed the tent. Nowhere else could the eye discern anything whatever, save a star or two peeping through some chink among the leaves. From the unseen *caño* came an occasional small sound, too slight to disclose its cause, the swirl of a fish, perhaps, or the lapping of some little animal's tongue. Then these died out. Elsewhere, farther off, spoke muffled voices of unknown night creatures. But at the creek the stillness was intense.

Then into the air floated a smell. Faint, very faint it was, but unpleasant; a watery effluvium suggestive of a noxious marsh. It might, perhaps, be an exhalation from the damp bank of the stream, so recently soaked by flood. But it was not. It came from something nearer. From something below. From—the thing! The thing was here!

The chills which had just swept over the hanging watcher were as nothing to the freezing cold which seized him now. For seconds which seemed hours he lay rigid as ice, and as devoid of warmth. The fiendish silence of the thing, the sudden realization that it was under him,

shocked him numb. Neither sight nor sound had betrayed its coming. But it was there. He sensed its presence with inexplicable certainty. Moreover, he felt that it had sensed him in turn.

The agonizing paralysis passed. Blood flowed again. Breath returned. Brain and nerve coordinated. The torch turned down. The button-finger pressed. Light stabbed the dark—jerked about—halted.

There it was!

There, in the form most repulsive to him, it was. A form serpentine, awful, incredibly huge. A disordered coil, from which rose a frightful scaly neck topped by a cruel head. Motionless it stood upon itself, fixedly staring into the dazzling white eye of the torch. And motionless again lay the man behind that torch, dazed by the enormity of the reptile.

So the two faced each other for long, dragging seconds. Then the finger pressing the flat button involuntarily relaxed a tiny bit. Light vanished.

But instantly it reappeared, the finger now jabbing the switch forward into the locking position. The white eye glared again, to wink no more. Yet, as it centered for the second time on the frightful head, it found that head nearer. In that fraction of time the serpent had lengthened its neck by a yard or more. Now it stood again, fixed.

Cold, hard, implacable, the eyes of the soulless thing stared again, unwinking, into the dazzling lens. And again, with finger tight on trigger, the man above lay motionless, looking down into them.

Bright as jewels, they were; jewels filled with changing gleams of color, now green, now red, now yellow, now blue-white; glints aroused, perhaps, by slight tremors of the electric ray, or, possibly, reflections of varying depths of merciless mood within the brain behind those lambent orbs. Presently, without perceptible motion, those eyes left the unimpressible torch to fasten full on the gaze and the mind of the watcher.

The evanescent hues became more brilliant, more gemlike. Emeralds, lustrous emeralds, glimmered there, yielding to sparks shot from ruby and topaz and diamond. And they were growing larger, coming nearer—

Phew! That smell! It was coming near, too. A sudden chill crawled down Marden's spine. This infernal creature actually was closer than before, the head stealthily rising all the time, the eyes holding his with the same concentration as those of a human enemy advancing within striking range.

His teeth clenched. His gun—Rafe's gun—shoved its muzzle through the meshes at the muzzle of the reptile.

Another streak of light slashed the dark—a streak of flame. Five more spat in roaring succession. Dull clicks followed, hammer still beating at empty shells. From the Castillo del Diablo broke a volley of echoes.

The head was gone.

Down on the ground a mighty body thrashed in terrible convulsions, knotting about itself, hurling itself to right and left, rolling, writhing, fighting to push itself ahead, yet going nowhere. Up in the hammock, face set in a mask of hate, the man who had knocked down the Thing drew his other gun. Steadying himself in his yielding net, he shot downward again, again, and yet again, firing now with cold deliberation.

At each report the fiend jerked spasmodically, but more weakly. Another shot, and another. Now it lay shuddering, but nailed to the ground, only its tail still sweeping from side to side. Gradually this in turn became inert.

The Thing was dead.

Gross, hideous, nauseous, it sprawled in disordered arcs and loops. From a half-dozen bullet-holes oozed thick blood, to sink slowly into the soil and mingle with that of the victim crushed to pulp there yesternight. From all its slimy length exuded reptilian stench, a hundredfold more rank than the first emanation which had betrayed it. The Thing, the hellish Thing just now animate with uncanny power, had become merely a broken-backed carcass stinking in the night.

Then it was well for Julian that he lay

in a sturdy net. Else he must have fallen. Revulsion smote him like a bludgeon. All strength vanished. On his face he slumped, to quiver and quake and gag body and mind and soul utterly sick.

XIX

THE MOON, well up in the east, peered through the screen of branches and leaves at a tent knocked awry and befouled by gouts of blood; at an enormous serpent motionless beside the lopsided shelter; at a man in a high hammock, rousing from stupor.

So violent had been the reaction of racked nerves and brain that, when his physical spasms ceased, that man had sunk into coma. Now, with mind rested and reanimated by the period of oblivion, he stirred, looked about, drew a long breath, and perfunctorily shut off the light still shining from his torch. Presently he reached a hand to the bough and sat up, legs dangling over an edge of his nest; drew from a pocket a flattened package of cigarets, lighted one of its rumpled but unbroken white rolls and sucked smoke deep into his chest. Thereafter he looked judicially down at the snake.

It was a snake now, not a thing; a snake of mammoth proportions and great age, but nothing more. In the wan light of the moon the phantasmal voices which had whispered to him in the dark were silent. This serpent was a natural creature, as had been the *dalle* snake and the jaguar and the eel; all of them deadly, evil, cunning, but unendowed with the hateful minds and vengeful memories of men—or demons. So, since the creeping killer was natural, reason now proceeded to construct a natural course and cause of its coming.

Its course must have begun at that gulf swamp behind the Castillo, where Dussault had shot that much smaller boa of the same breed. And the cause of its taking that course probably was that same shooting. Over at the end of that path of crushed grass must be the noisome home of a family of these *culebras de agua*. And from that lair, soon or late after the killing of the youngster and the retreat of its captor, must have crawled this patriarch, either to investigate or to begin a food-hunt along the creek. Thus creeping, it would come upon the footprints and the scents left behind by Dussault and the dead creature dragged to the canoe. The death-reek of the young reptile would be unmistakable. So too, probably, would be the man-scent stamped into the soil by the laboring enthusiast. Then—

But did snakes possess the sense of smell? There were people who said snakes were stone deaf; others who averred their sight was very poor. Perhaps some others would deprive them also of the powers of smell and taste. But nobody could deny that they had means of perceiving their prey, as well as lethal surety in capturing it. And they had nostrils; so they should logically have olfactories as well. Naturally. At any rate, there were the two scents in the path of the great serpent; and not only smells but heel-tracks, plainly visible even to the reputedly myopic vision of its species, leading to the water.

So, though one could hardly credit a creature so inhuman with affection for even its own offspring, one could easily conceive it attempting to trail the intruder; swimming along the waterway, now up, now down, until it discovered the recently arrived canoe lying where none had lain before. There, craftily creeping up that bare stone and inland, it would find again the odor of its dead kin, still emanating from the earth whereon the carcass had lain throughout the hot afternoon.

And there close at hand, clear enough to the sight and scent of the nocturnal hunter, stood the tent, giving off the smells of sweaty clothing and other possessions of men. To this the killer would glide, finding the loose flap, stealing in murderously intent on attack, only to find no men within. Thereupon, angered, it would knock things about a bit, yank

down the clothing, find all inedible, and consequently depart.

Yes, it had been this deadly giant, not mere inquisitive monkeys, which upset the interior of the shelter two nights ago. And Dussault's apparently unreasonable impulse to sleep on the Castillo, and his companion's tolerant acquiescence in his whim, had enabled both to evade the marauder. True, the serpent could have followed them even there, had it possessed the skill to unravel the confused scent-trails left about the camp. But it was by instinct a water-snake, not accustomed to follow dry land paths very far or to lift its ponderous bulk to such heights.

So it had waited here, perhaps, until dawn; then gone back to its lair—to return another night, lurk with cold patience in the shadows, and, this time, to win its game. Gorged, it had dragged itself directly to the water, leaving behind that broad notch at the edge, which the searcher had noted this morning.

So all the mystery of Dussault's death was clarified now. So, too, was the fate of those two local adventurers, Rodolfo and Moisé. Perhaps, when they paddled into that flooded inlet and made their camp, this destroyer had been lying hidden near at hand, and had bided its time. Or perhaps, while night-foraging along the stream, it had found their canoe and gone ashore to them. At any rate it had found them—both sleeping in one hammock—double prey to one swift-circling loop. Yet there had been a struggle; the wrecked poles of the hut testified to that. But the gigantic reptile had won, and the men had died, to go in turn down the gullet of the conqueror. Small wonder that no trace of the bodies remained!

And had the other men, their predecessors, met the same fate? Ramón had said that several unfortunates had perished in here. It was possible; yes, probable. There could be no question that this brute was a habitual slayer of men. Or, rather, that it had been such in the past. It would devour no more. All those men now were avenged, as well as Rafe. The avenger looked down on his work with grim satisfaction. Yes, Rafe's account was squared!

It was as well, perhaps, that he knew no more about snakes in general or about this one in particular. Else he would have realized that his vengeance had fallen short; that this malefactor below him was not the slayer of Dussault. He would have known that a snake full-fed would creep to a covert and sleep there for days before hunger again roused it; and that, therefore, this could not be the one which had swallowed a heavy man one night ago.

The truth was that the annihilator of the treasure-mad deserter was now resting unharmed in its lair up in the swamp, and that the colossus dead beside the tent was its mate. Both had been here last night. The quicker had struck first, and thereafter held to its quarry. The mate, still hungry, had come back tonight for another attempt, only to expiate the deed of its consort.

Yet it was also true that this reptile was guilty of the death of one of the Venezuelans at the hut, and of a man or two before them. There at the inlet, as here, the mates had chanced to hunt together. Their attack had been united, their success equal. It would have given Marden no consolation, however, to learn that he had avenged men unknown to him while leaving the assassin of Dussault unpunished. Thus partial ignorance was better for his peace of mind than full knowledge. It is often so.

Now he dropped his cigaret stub, looked slowly about and presently drew up his legs and lay back in his net. There was no other good place in which to spend the night. Even had the tent not been knocked askew, he would not have rested in it, so near to that hated thing on the ground. Up here was a gentle breeze, a mild moon, comfort and safety. And he was tired, too tired to climb down. So he turned his back to the serpent, put his thoughts on the morrow, and, after awhile, forgot everything.

XX

ANOTHER night; another rising of the moon.

Weird as ever, the Castillo del Diablo scowled from its hilltop like a bulky-bodied, black-horned monster of ferocity awaiting the coming of victims. Among its towers the lesser demons of stone glowered with changeless malignity at one another and at small traces of the conquest of their fastness by men at a long scratch on a motionless inky wave, a knot of rope around a short spire and fragments of a little glass bottle.

Each of these was a cryptic record, to which only the tongueless freaks and one living man knew the key. The scratch marked the halt of a disheartening, almost despairing search; the knot, a spot of daring and of victory; the glass a place where temptation and heritage had throttled affection and good intent, and where a man had begun a march to the jaws of death.

In time all these vestiges would vanish, the scratch dulling under the darkening action of dew, the knot rotting apart, and the glass moving before the onslaught of rain-torrents to the gaping maw of the pit. Until then the malformations must endure the constant reminder that the treasure so long guarded among them had been wrested from their clutch.

By that time, too, the camp down by the *caño*, where the men from across the ocean had erected a house of cloth, would be marked only by ant-gnawed bones of a long-dead leviathan. Even now, though those bones still were encased in malodorous flesh, nothing else remained—except a heap of ashes. The tent that had stood there last night, the hammock that had hung from a high bough, the canoe that had waited at the shore, the man who owned them, all had disappeared, never to return.

The bedaubed tent and every other ignitible thing henceforth unessential to that man had fed a fire. The treasure trunk and all else of value had moved into the sturdy *curial* of two dead men. Then that faithful craft, obedient to the will of its new master, had floated down past the inlet whence it had been rescued, around a high-banked curve, and so forever away.

NOW, IF the eye of the moon sought that man along creek or river, it failed at first to find him. Many another man and camp and boat it found in the region below the great black Tetas, where hordes of turtles now were nightly excavating in the vast sandy *playas* and evacuating their myriad eggs. Lowly dugouts of bare Indians or poor mestizos, higher *falcas* of men somewhere more important, big *bongos* of freighters, even a few proudmasted *piraguas* near Urbana—these snuggled along the shore near flimsy pole-and-plantain shelters or palm-sided huts or adobe houses, wherein some men slept and some did not. But of the canoe that, months past, had gone up the Caño del Muerto there was no sign. It had not yet emerged.

Out of sight of moon or men, it lay in a tree-shrouded indentation near the mouth of the creek, well below the red-fanged reef where the eel had lurked a week ago, yet not at the edge of the open sand. There it had hidden most of the time since mid-afternoon; and there, with patience worn to the breaking point, its master sat now with one hand on a paddle, the other at intervals drawing a watch, eyes measuring the creep of moonbeams out on the *caño*, ears listening for any sound from the direction of the river. Hours ago he had learned that exit from this waterway was not so free as entrance had been. Its mouth now was guarded.

On the sand where previously had moved only harmless turtles, now waited armed men. The object of their wait was clear enough to his mind. That long-range surveillance from the Teta had been prompted by purpose based on knowledge. The legend of the lost treasure was known to more than one man. And, though the sinister repute of this creek of vanishing adventures had restrained these conspirators from hazarding their own lives within its shadows, it

held no terrors for them outside the tree line. Therefore, they had built a small shelter half-way between woods and river, and there, comfortable as cats resting at the mouth of a mouse-hole, they lurked in vigilant indolence.

Six or eight of them were there; hard-faced, hard-tongued mestizos, with three or four guns among them. Only cautious reconnoitering by the outcoming American that afternoon had saved him from discovery. Halting his boat at the last turn within the woods, he had stolen forward on foot, and thus spied them. A half hour of watching and listening from behind a tree made unmistakable their characters and intentions. So he had withdrawn, undetected, to take his ease while awaiting night. After dark he could slip past them, he thought. But when, two hours after sunset, he had drifted quietly down, he found a fire casting its light on the narrow stream and watchers still alert. So he had withdrawn again, to await the time when all slept.

Although he did not realize it, he had only himself to blame for the pertinacity of these waylayers. For two days now the observer on the Teta top had failed to discern the pair previously seen in the vicinage of the Castillo. Two nights ago the devil of that castle had growled; and in the morning, while the ominous voice still sounded, an empty canoe had come drifting out. Thereupon the watchers had profanely agreed as to the fate of the foreigners and left their station.

The broken paddle which came down later in the day had passed unseen. But this forenoon the man with the spyglass, taking one more look for luck, had seen smoke rising at the base of the castle; the smoke of the fire by which Marden cleaned camp. Therefore the guard had been reestablished.

The only fact which mattered to the owner of the treasure, however, was that those robbers now were there. He must get past them, and he was aching to go. Time and again his impatience goaded him to surge out of the shadows with a gun in each hand and shoot his way through. But common sense told him he could not wage a successful fight against such odds and simultaneously paddle his canoe; and unless he paddled he must run aground. So he still forced himself to remain in concealment.

As the night wore on, he reasoned, their vigilance would relax. In years gone by he himself had done sentry duty, walking post with a Springfield over his shoulder in the dead hours of night, and well he knew the heaviness of brain which came upon a man when nothing occurred and the world slumbered. If these undisciplined sentinels did not suspend watch entirely when the hour grew late, they would at least doze.

At length he pushed out once more. Stroking slowly and silently, he floated riverward on the gentle current. No sound came from below. Presently the trees thinned, and beyond shone open moonlight on the *playa*. At the very edge he stopped his heavy craft and stood to estimate the situation.

The fire, some rods away, was almost out. The hut was quiet and dark. Against a corner post squatted a somnolent shape, head drooping, rifle across its thighs. Inside hung two or three hammocks, their taut curves merging into one another against the whitish background of sand. No other men were there. Half the gang, at least, had gone, probably to sleep more comfortably in the huts at the base of the Tetas.

Marden's eyes glowed, then contracted to pinpoints. The odds had shrunk, but still were formidable. If nobody awoke he could get past. But that fellow drowsing outside might awake at any moment. The best surety that he would not—and his pals as well—was to take measures to make the sleep of all of them profound. His mouth set in a hard line. They meant to get rough with him, did they? He too could play that game!

Scanning the sands, he noted a low black stone, perhaps two feet high, projecting at a spot about half-way between trees and hut. It was poor cover, but

better than none. Forthwith he tied the canoe; then walked along the edge of the woods until the stone was in line with the lazy sentinel. There he sank to hands and knees and crawled toward the hut.

Steadily but stealthily he advanced until he reached the stone. There he flattened to rest briefly and peer around one side. Nobody in the hut moved. From it floated a low snore. The lolling figure outside showed no sign of wakefulness. He made ready to resume his stalk. But then, just as his muscles tensed to lift him, some unnamable sense warned him to be cautious. He lay still. Less than half a minute later the watchman lifted his head.

Sleepily he looked along the empty water, at the stone behind which Marden lay, and to right and left across the sands. Then he changed his position a little and relaxed again. Slowly his head sank, stopping with slight jerks, only to droop lower. Before long it hung inert, jaw on chest. But Marden, wary, waited several minutes more. Then he moved with speed.

No other friendly stones intervened; so there was little sense in continuing his creep. Fast work now was needed. Rising to full height with a gun gripped tight in one hand, he sprang into a light-footed dash straight for the most dangerous man—the sentinel.

At his last stride the napping watcher awoke. Eyes and mouth gaped at the gaunt figure which had sprung from nowhere. But the swarthy hands jerked up the ready rifle. They were a second too slow. A flying foot of the apparition kicked him hard in the face, knocking his head back against the post. A swinging revolver-barrel slammed violently against his left ear. The guard collapsed, out cold.

Into the hut darted the raider. Two men were there. Both were awake, jarred from sleep by the impact of the watchman's hard head on the post, which had shaken the whole framework of poles. Now one started up with a gasp of fear. The other, tight-mouthed, seized a rifle as he arose.

Again Marden struck with his gun, an oblique chop on the temple of the nearer man, who now was drawing a knife. That man gasped again and fell back over his loose hammock, the knife sliding from nerveless fingers. Toward the gunman the assailant wheeled—to leap instantly aside. As he dodged, the rifle spat flame.

Fired from the hip, it hurled its heavy slug through the space where the abdomen of the intruder had just been. Its loud report thumped far across the silent sands. Before its owner could pump up another cartridge the barrel was seized in an iron grip. Both gun and man were jerked toward the raider, who, teeth agleam in a fighting grin, swung his revolver a third time. Again the short but solid weapon struck under an ear. And again the possessor of the ear crumpled up and lay still where he dropped.

"Came mighty near shooting you, you fool!" panted Marden, still grinning mirthlessly. "You had it coming! But there's been enough killing over that treasure. There'll be no more if I can help it. Now good night, you bum stick-ups!"

Retaining the captured rifle, he glanced once around, leaped to the huddled sentinel, and seized his gun also. There were no others. At top speed he sprinted back to his canoe. Reaching it, he threw in both rifles, untied the rope, snatched up his paddle, and raced for the river. That gunshot must have been heard, he knew. There was no time to waste.

For the first time he cursed the boat in which he rode. Previously he had been pleased by its solid weight, which would make it the more seaworthy in the rolling river. But now its heaviness was a handicap, for it responded sluggishly to his fierce strokes. Before he emerged from the sand-constricted stream he saw men running from the Tetas, glimpsed gun-barrels in the moonlight. Gritting his teeth, he threw all his strength into propulsion, raising a creamy roll before the blunt prow, yet seeming to drag an anchor behind.

The water broadened, the sand drew away. He was debouching into the wide river, indeed, was now in it, and a vague target against its dark water. But the running men had come within easy range and still were advancing. Then one stopped. A rifle barked. A spurt of water shot up close at hand—too close.

"Well, if you will have it!" grated the fugitive. He dropped his paddle inboard —swung one of the rifles outboard— aimed low—fired.

The shape which had shot at him jerked forward, staggered an instant, fell. From it came a scared howl:

"*Ajo! Mi pierna!* My leg is gone!"

The others stopped short. Another rifle flamed. Its heavy bullet droned past Marden and splashed far beyond the canoe. Forthwith he responded in kind and, with no more pauses except to shift aim, continued to respond.

Sighting low as before, he shot the legs from under man after man. That he killed none was manifest from their rollings and scramblings and yells. He did not mean to kill, unless killing proved imperative. But he meant to put them down to stay down until he was far away from that region. And he did. Men with leg-bones smashed by .44 bullets are poor pursuers.

Scattered shots flashed back at him as he fought and a bullet or two hummed uncomfortably close; yet none struck him or his canoe. Less than a minute after the first man had stopped to take aim the small battle was over. On the sands half a dozen crippled men dragged themselves frantically toward stones or hollows, abandoning their guns, expecting every instant the lethal shock of more bullets. Out on the water their conqueror grinned once more, dropped the rifle overboard, and picked up his paddle.

Sinking the broad blade over the side, he swung one final look along the sands. At his feet lay the other rifle, ready for more war if any man desired it. Apparently none did. No new forms came from the direction of the Tetas. None of the wounded gunmen tried to retrieve his gun and renew hostilities. All lay low, grunting, growling, swearing. Presently their conqueror took a long, strong stroke, turning the bow outward.

Then from some one of the mestizos, now safe behind a rock, blurted a cursing question:

"*Quién es?* Who are you? You devil! Who are you?"

Marden's lips narrowed at the epithets. But then his lips quirked as an inner imp whispered a name. In a sepulchral tone he answered:

"Rodolfo Martinez!"

Silence, instantaneous and complete, swept the *playa*. Rodolfo Martinez, dead six months up Dead Man's Creek, now issuing forth in a ghostly canoe, assailing every man in his way, vanishing out on the river! That was why no bullets had hit him. No bullet could hurt a ghost! *Diablo!*

Perhaps, when the scared wits of the rascally gang returned to them, they doubted the veracity of that ghost; but by that time he was beyond the reach of further questions. More likely they still believed—at least outwardly—that they had fought a fiend; and the unconscious trio at the hut, on reviving and hearing the tale, swore that it was truth, and that each of them in turn had attacked the apparition with gun and knife, only to find it an invulnerable but diabolically powerful shadow. At any rate, no voice followed the vague shape on the river as it drew farther and farther away.

Laughing silently, Marden settled to his work. Outward he paddled steadily, borne downward all the time by the lateral push of the current, until the full flow of midstream grasped his boat. Then he turned his bow. With the Orinoco steadily shoving astern, and paddle swinging with the regularity of a pendulum abeam, the canoe floated away into the misty distance and was gone from the ken of the Devil's Castle, the Dead Man's Creek, and all their ghosts and beasts and men.

The colossal Tetas crept behind, to be seen no more by the voyager, whose gaze

dwelt ever ahead. New *playas* opened on either hand. On some of their moon-whitened expanses showed black spots which might be camping places of men. But if men were there, and if those men had heard the shooting behind the great domes, and if they saw the low-riding dugout and its single paddler, none felt moved to investigate.

None knew who traveled in that *curial* or why he voyaged alone at this strange hour; and none cared. So, after awhile, the canoeman paused in his rhythm to drop his remaining rifle over the side. Then he swung on again through the night to meet whatever might come with the dawn.

XXI

SUNRISE reddened the sky behind the hills at whose base lay the village of Urbana. Within the clay-walled houses most of the townspeople still slept. But on the decks of the *piraguas* moored beside the flood-terraced banks the mestizo rivermen arose, yawning, to begin another day; and from the open hatches climbed their captains to see that they began it right. Villagers who seldom went anywhere might take their time in awaking, but these sailors were used to bestirring themselves at the first light.

The cooks, kindling fires in the hip-high boxes or empty gasoline tins serving as galleys, began their work of heating the matutinal coffee. The other crewmen lounged about, waiting and talking. Soon one of those on the first boat squinted upstream, stood silent a moment, then announced:

"*Mira!* Look! An Englishman comes! And he paddles alone!"

Down the channel between an island and the mainland approached a canoe, propelled wearily by a lone, lean, khaki-clad man wearing a helmet. It was this English headgear which established his hypothetical nationality.

The news passed quickly from ship to ship. Thereupon all stood to stare. English *señores* were rare up here. And one who paddled his own canoe instead of employing boatmen—as every traveler should do in a land where manual toil was distinctly derogatory to dignity—such a *señor* was not merely rare, but unique.

Steadily, though slowly, the stranger came on. Abreast the first of the *piraguas* he slowed his stroke, scanning the men on deck. Unspeaking, he floated past, his gaze running over the vessels beyond. Then his paddle stopped altogether, and his dugout bobbed up and down on the waves which, aroused by the lusty morning wind, momentarily grew taller.

More wordless minutes passed, while newcomer and natives exchanged scrutinies. Upon the rivermen grew the impressions that the outlander had come far and that he was well able to take care of himself. His drawn face and tired droop betokened the one, his cool regard and belted revolver the other. And, despite his lack of men, he was indubitably a *señor*. He owned baggage.

At length the foreigner spoke, in drawling, unaccented, but intelligible Spanish.

"Who goes down the river today?"

"I," answered the master of the third boat.

"How soon?"

"*Pronto.*"

"How far?"

"Caicara."

The canoeman studied him, his crew, his ship. The men looked reasonably honest, the vessel tolerably clean. His paddle dipped again. His dugout drew alongside.

"I will ride with you," he announced.

"*Bien,*" acquiesced the captain, eying him shrewdly. "But there is a price for that!"

"Without doubt," was the calm reply. "I shall meet it—if it is within reason. Now hand me some of that coffee I smell."

"*Con mucho gusto!*" The captain grinned this time. "But first come around to the shore side."

The other nodded, glancing at the mounting waves, already dangerous to his deep-floating *curial*. Around the bow

he worked, to go aground on slightly submerged clay. There the peons of the crew met him, one bearing a thick cup of scalding coffee. Deliberately he sipped at it, while the peons awaited his permission to tranship his baggage. Meanwhile the swarthy captain studied him anew.

"Are you not one of the *señores* who traveled with Ramón Perdomo last week?" he quizzed.

"Why?" countered the northerner, steady-eyed.

"Ah—I heard of two such *señores—Norte Americanos.*"

"And what of it?"

"Nothing, nothing. When does Ramón return down the river?"

The other sipped again, dropping his gaze to the cup to mask a look of elation. Ramón had not yet come down. That simplified matters considerably.

"*Mañana*—so he says," he answered presently. "But each day he says the same, and I have tired of waiting for *mañana*. I have business which does not wait."

"Ah, *sí*, precisely. The *sarrapia* business." The captain winked sagaciously, proud of his knowledge of the uncommunicative stranger's affairs. "And the other *señor* stays behind with Ramón."

"He stays behind," echoed the calm voice.

The cup tilted higher and the coffee, now cooler, diminished more rapidly. When the stimulant was all imbibed the drinker arose briskly, tossed the cup to the captain and stepped ashore with a mute gesture toward his duffle. The peons fell to work, while the tall *señor* stood with negligent pose but watchful eye.

Bags and boxes were thrown carelessly up to the deck. Last was lifted the trunk. At the feel of its weight the two men handling it grunted in astonishment.

"*Cra!*" gasped one, as the case thumped on the planks above. "That must be full of gold!"

He laughed as he spoke, but his eyes sharpened. So did all others, dwelling an instant on the inordinately ponderous container, then flashing to the face of its owner. He smiled tolerantly.

"Books," he drawled.

"Books?" The captain's tone was incredulous. "You carry a trunk full of books?"

"*Cómo no?* Why not? One must have some way of passing time."

"*Sí, sí*, naturally," came quick agreement. But the gaze of the shipmaster remained sharp, and the deckhands glanced sidelong at one another.

The foreigner laughed quietly.

"If you think that is gold, let me make a gamble with you," he proposed. "Will you agree to take the trunk and all it holds, instead of money, for my passage?"

"*Cra*, no!" refused the Orinocan, suspicion instantly reversing itself. "I must have cash. I am no bookseller."

"Well, suit yourself. But money is soon spent, while books can teach you many things—"

"No! I will not take such trash! *Cra*, a whole shipload of books would not buy me a pound of beans! *Dinero, señor*, good silver *bolívares*, must pay your passage if you sail with me!"

"Very well," laughed the bargainer. "Then put the trunk down below and place the food and other things on it, where I can reach them easily. I have read most of the books."

The captain grunted. His men scrambled aboard and lowered the despised trunk into the hold, while the literate foreigner, smiling over something amusing, drew himself up the side. His other possessions went down the hatch in turn, the peons now looking covetously at the cans of meat and fish. The despised books were already forgotten.

Up on the deck the passenger cast a glance over the squatty hamlet, now flooded with sunlight. Doors were opening. A few figures moved languidly among the houses. Soon the entire population would be wide awake. And the *jefe civil*, the chief official of this town, had proven himself an inquisitive fellow last week when two strangers came up. He might be more so now, when only one

came back. The traveler let his gaze wander outward at the rolling waves, then meet the captain's eye.

"A good wind is being wasted," he suggested. "Are you like Ramón? Do you sail *mañana?*"

"No, *por Dios!* We sail now!"

"Good. Tie my canoe behind, and let's go."

The dugout was guided around the vessel and tethered at the stern. With no more ado the anchor was hauled up and a sail broken out. The *piragua* came to life, bumped her way past another, and took the open water. A few minutes later she was far beyond earshot of other crews and beating steadily into the morning wind.

"Now," said the *señor,* "let us talk business. I wish to go directly to Bolívar, with no wait at Caicara. How much?"

"Eighty pesos," hazarded the captain.

"You are a robber. Thirty."

"*Dios!* Thirty? Positively not! Seventy, *señor.*"

"Forty."

"I will set you back on shore. Sixty pesos!"

"Fifty! And not one centimo more. Fifty pesos, straight through to Bolívar!"

They eyed each other. Then the captain shrugged.

"Fifty pesos, then, in cash. No books!"

"Agreed."

The stranger turned away, eyes twinkling. With languid step he walked astern, to squat on one heel near the steersman. There, in a casual way, he drew the revolver from its holster, opened it, closed it, sheathed it again. The steersman, watching sidewise, saw that the gun was fully loaded. He was unaware that a similar weapon snuggled in a deep side pocket of the khaki trousers. But that knowledge was unnecessary. What he had already observed was more than sufficient for him and all others on board.

The town dwindled, then disappeared behind a high-shouldered sand-bank. Other *playas* obtruded astern, some still rimmed by thinned hordes of turtles and dotted with sun-shelters of Indians or mestizos.

The river itself, except for short near stretches, was swallowed up by the curving, undulating sands. Yet still the heights beyond these were visible, far, hazy mountains, nearer masses of lower hills behind which, long lost to view but not to memory, were strange black rocks resembling human breasts and a ruinous castle. And still the lean, bronzed man with tired brown eyes squatted on a heel and gazed back, as men sometimes look when they have left behind a sweetheart or a comrade.

At length he spoke, so softly that the peon at the tiller hardly heard and did not understand.

"Good-by, old fellow."

Then he lay wearily down on his back and drew his helmet over his face. And mile after mile, league after league, the little ship footed her way down the tawny river toward the far blue sea.

The Boast of a Barber of Mexico

LITTLE BROTHER *to El Tigre*

By JOHN DORMAN

"MY SOUL to heaven," sighed Miguel into the broad ear of Pepe Torillo, "it is hard indeed to be bondsman for the sins of a renegade brother, *caballero!*"

Pepe was far from being the noble-born knight-at-arms that *caballero* properly implies, since he was in fact a fish merchant who perpetually smelled of his calling, but politeness was perhaps the most evident feature of the barber shop of Miguel del Lago.

Yet by no means was that shop to be sneered at as a makeshift and antiquated affair of the sort to be expected in outlying Mexican villages, where an inclination to the trade is practically the only qualification most barbers seem to possess.

Miguel's establishment and its accouterments were the pride of Rayo del Sol which is near the northern border of Chihuahua and which exists for no particular reason at all.

For Miguel had a reclining chair with a sliding foot rest of the type not more than twenty-five years behind the best *Americano* patterns and, besides this, a large if rather flawed mirror—even more prone to exaggeration than Miguel himself—no less than three highly ornamented shaving mugs, four razors, two pair of shears, a bottle of bay rum and even a pair of dull clippers.

Nor was there any of that terrifying bathroom glitter which spoils the atmosphere of most American tonsorial parlors. No, the place was cool, well aged and so comfortable withal that even a humble flea might feel at home there.

For Miguel had vision. He knew just how far a man might go with new-fangled foolishness in order to be praised as progressive without being condemned as an industrial and social revolutionist.

So the shop was decidedly homelike, even if he had no brood of children playing

on the floor as most Mexican barbers seem to have. He once had a wife for a short time, but—

Well, the less said of her the better. At any rate, since she departed, between two days, with a tall, lithe, fiercely mustached, gorgeously clad *vaquero*—Miguel was none of these things, being little and plump and a dreamer of sorts—he had lived alone with his goats and his sorrow.

And with his violin and the crimes of his elder brother, Constantino. The first of these had become as his soul to him after Dolores proved false, and "Tino's" swashbuckling escapades had ever been to Miguel both an avowed thorn in the flesh and a source of great satisfaction.

"Aye," assented Torillo, relaxing in sublime peace as the soft hands of Miguel rubbed bay rum over his face. "And what now hath thy villainous brother done?"

"*Ay de mí!*" lamented the barber, snipping a hair from Pepe's rather puerile beard. "It is not enough that he should despoil and rob the iniquitous and heretical *Americanos* across the border! No, he must now kill and rob an illustrious Spaniard, and this in the very shadow of the man's *hacienda* at Las Palomas. His Excellency el Señor Don Alvar Alonzo de Varo, even!

"So I must add one more to the candles I burn at Our Lady's chapel. *Dios!* An even score of candles burn there now! As I promised my mother on her dying bed when the sins of her first-born hung heavily upon her and as I have faithfully done, to which the good Padre Ramón bears witness! One candle for every soul Tino sends to heaven or perdition. And this for ten years! *Madre!*

"I, Miguel del Lago!" his voice boomed; he stopped his beard-trimming to wave shears and comb in his customer's face. "I, born in the hills—brought up in the saddle! I, tied to this lowly craft by the infamous crimes of an infamous brother when my heart burns to be fighting stirrup to stirrup with—" he darted a quick glance around and softened his speech to a hissing whisper—"the mighty Villa! Fighting for Mexico's freedom—or whatever business it is about which he is fighting!"

Pepe half arose to take his look around. It was part of the formula, the ritual. Thus always did Miguel introduce every tale of El Tigre's doings; thus always did Pepe glance about to make sure that no spying eyes saw him listen to treason.

The tale proper lost naught in the telling. Intrinsically, it was the old, old story of the ruthless knave shooting down a foolishly brave man and despoiling him of his horse, money and weapons.

Miguel embellished it liberally, adding —out of his imagination—that El Tigre had boldly carried the mortally wounded man up to his very door and left him with the remark that few but Tino, El Tigre, would be so merciful and kind as thus to care for a man who offered opposition to being robbed.

The Señor de Varo died that night, but it was not until the hue and cry raised by his death had subsided that El Tigre wrote a letter to the *rurales*, boastfully proclaiming himself the slayer and taunting the officers because of their inability to catch him.

Miguel made much of this, pointing out to the illiterate Pepe what the paper said about it, and showing how because of it the reward offered for El Tigre by the Mexican government had been increased to five thousand pesos.

Was not proof of this on the wall in the form of a brand new placard, among the many which bore grudging tributes to the prowess of Tino, from officials on both sides of the border?

HARDLY had Pepe, about whose person bay rum and the reek of fish now vied for supremacy, departed from the barber shop when Señor Martin G. Wordsworth entered it for the first time, and Miguel bowed low to welcome him.

For the Señor Wordsworth, about whose appearance there was little to indicate that his father had been a gringo, bore the stamp of the city dweller, and such persons ranked high in Miguel's eyes.

And he had the look, too, of a man accustomed to authority. His short body was very evidently possessed of immense strength and there was in his swarthy full-moon of a face—particularly in the wide-set eyes and in the tight lips—something which urgently called for respect if not admiration. Miguel, taking him to be a Mexican of high position, freely awarded him both.

Señor Wordsworth eased his body into the chair and very courteously requested a shave, although his beard could hardly have been more than a day old. Miguel's respect grew by leaps and bounds, for there was no man in all Rayo del Sol who shaved daily.

Before the shave was completed Wordsworth perforce heard a great deal about the operations of Tino El Tigre. But the tales seemed not to bore him, for long after Miguel had discovered and struck down the last whisker Señor Wordsworth sat in the barber shop listening to Miguel's recitals.

Very early in their acquaintance a pint of *tequila* came out of the Señor Wordsworth's hip pocket. Excellent *tequila*, too, not the impotent slop which too often passes for that spirit among border towns, now that thirsty gringos haunt them in the belief that there they will get real liquor. For real liquor usually comes from far in the interior and is much more expensive.

By the time the bottle was empty the light of admiration shone warmly in each pair of eyes and the formal "you" had long been abandoned for the informal and affectionate "thou."

"Seeing thee," said Señor Wordsworth most expansively, "I can well understand the fearlessness and spirit of thy perhaps unworthy brother. Aye, I can easily understand."

And Miguel, from the inner commotion born of his instinctive desire to call this *caballero* "excellency" and the self-flattering wish to use the "thou" as he had been bidden, answered modestly:

"My mother—may she rest in peace—did often say we two were as like in boldness and enterprise as ever two cubs could be. *Ay*, that is what makes it doubly hard thus to be bound to my barber's trade by the necessity of paying for candles and prayers for my brother's dead."

It being the siesta, they were long undisturbed, and when in the middle of the afternoon other friends and patrons of Miguel's came drifting into the shop Señor Wordsworth took his departure.

But he came again the next day, and the next and next and next, so truly endearing himself to Miguel with his flattering speeches, his courtly ways, his thirst for tales of El Tigre and his abundant supply of *tequila*, that the unwashed ears of the little barber's regular cronies rang with his flowery praise of his new friend, el Señor Don Martin.

Miguel asked him no questions as to his place in life and his business in Rayo del Sol. Was it not sufficient for a man to be a gentleman? Would a gentleman be burdened with business cares or wish to answer questions as to his doings?

They had been bosom friends for a week when el Señor Don Martin, with almost worshipful lights in his eyes and most praiseful tones in his voice, leaned close to Miguel and said:

"They whisper, those who know thee, that thou art El Tigre, Miguel. And others, that thou art in close league with him."

Miguel's face beamed as well might that of any dweller in "Ray of the Sun"; then, it clouded as if the sun had set. Marvelous as it was to be thus reverently praised, there were legal difficulties about being the famous El Tigre.

"I, *mio amigo*?" His plump soft hands spread wide in mute protest. "I? No! Compared to him I am indeed the most gentle and humble of men. I fear I would not dare to do his deeds for him. What I am in righteous anger, Don Martin, I leave for you to imagine; but as for such infamy as my brother devises, that is not for me."

"Yet," said Don Martin, slyly, "art thou not often gone from Rayo del Sol on

that infernal bicycle thou dost possess?"

He referred, of course, to Miguel's motorcycle, which had been bought for twenty dollars from an *Americano* who had started from Brownsville to follow the border west, and had run out of money and wanderlust at Rayo del Sol.

"But Don Martin!" objected Miguel. "I go to Juarez for an outing or some place to a *fiesta!* Is it not enough that I should be slave to twenty candles at an altar without also being serf to the soil of the village? Did I say twenty candles? *Por Dios*, it is one-and-twenty now!"

He was so evidently speaking the truth, and withal so sincere and naïve and simple, that Don Martin could do no less than avow his disbelief in the rumors which named Miguel El Tigre, but all the same el Señor Don Martin had more questions to ask and more comments to make.

"But it is true," he said, "that thou art of the stuff of which such men are made, my Miguel. Bold, fiery and daring. I have known many a little man with eyes as guileless as thine to be afflicted with an inhuman thirst for blood. And few have even so much as seen El Tigre, thou knowest, and therefore few can say with truth just who he is and is not."

Miguel, while admitting that no man need look the savage to be the bandit and the gun-fighter, wished very much that Don Martin's thin lips might find another topic of speech. It was well enough to gain a rather welcome fame as the brother of a great outlaw; it was well enough to be suspected of being that outlaw himself. But it was a horse of another color to have that suspicion too widely broadcast, for much discomfiture and an early death might come of it.

"True that few have seen him and lived," boasted Miguel. "Perhaps I alone could truly identify him, Don Martin. The eagle is not more wary, does not strike more unexpectedly, nor flee more wholly without trace."

Don Martin seemed doubly convinced of Miguel's probity, but he kept ever close to the little barber's ear while he spoke what further was in his mind.

"That, my Miguel, is why I am here," he whispered. "Thou alone canst put him in my hands. Thou knowest well the rewards that are offered for him—five thousand pesos on this side of the border and as many dollars on the other side. That is a great deal of money and the gringo rewards would be paid to the man who brought him in."

He didn't add that the Mexican rewards might go to the captain of *rurales* or other official who received him, but Miguel understood that, because he knew one captain of *rurales* rather well.

"And I, my little game-cock," went on Don Martin, "am a private detective. Didst thou guess it?" It was subtle flattery, that question.

Miguel had not bothered to guess, of course; it was his temperament to accept intimacy on absolute, unquestioning, unprying conditions, when intimacy was accepted at all. But he nodded silently, as if such things had been known to him always and had not mattered in the least.

"And I am right," said Don Martin, "in believing that El Tigre comes sometimes to see thee?"

Again Miguel nodded.

"Sometimes," he said.

"And it would be a great justice to him," continued the wily Don Martin, "if he was to be placed in an institution of reformation, where the good fathers might prevail upon him to repent his sins. Also it would free thee of the expense of many candles and the saying of many prayers and allow thee to seek thy destiny with the mighty Villa."

"True," admitted Miguel. "Very true."

"So if I take up my residence with thee," further explained Don Martin, "the time will come when El Tigre will walk into my hands."

Miguel shrugged.

"Excellency, he is like a wisp of smoke, a beam of light. The hands of many officers of the law have closed upon him—in their imaginations. Yet he lives and rides freely where he will. I would not

have thee too confident of success. Knowing thy presence here, he surely would not come."

"I must take the risk of his learning of my presence," said Don Martin simply. Then, persuasively, "And of course, Miguel, there is thy portion of the reward to be considered."

Miguel's eyes flashed. No muscle of his face moved, yet in an instant the amiable, voluble barber and *raconteur* was lost in the hard, cold, inately cruel, self-sufficient Indian whose pride has been trampled, who has been struck in the face, fed with his dogs or set to work with his women.

"My brother, señor?" he asked. "My brother?"

Don Martin retreated with a haste which yet did not lack suave sureness.

"*Madre de Dios!*" he exclaimed with a great show of proper horror. "How could I have said that when I meant only that thou wouldst be rewarded by the knowledge that thy brother is at last turned from his evil ways! It would be unthinkable for thee to take money for thy brother, my Miguel! Yes, unthinkable!"

He paused, rolled his eyes piously upward and went on—

"But it would not be amiss should I live with thee a space, Miguel?"

"No," said Miguel. "That would not be amiss."

"And I would pay thee board," continued Don Martin. "That would be but just. Yes, let us say a hundred dollars *Americano* in advance and five—no, let us say ten dollars *Americano* a week while I am with thee. And perhaps a small present of five hundred dollars if I am made happy here?"

"There could be no moral objection to that," Miguel said in answer to the question in Don Martin's tones. "It is understood that a guest may give his host a parting gift."

"It will be sufficient for the world and for thy brother, should he come," continued Don Martin, "that I am one who finds the climate on this side of the border more conducive to health and long life than the climate across the line. Thou needst say only that to thy friends, Miguel; they will understand."

So the hoard of money Miguel kept in a secret place was more than doubled, and Don Martin took up his residence in the rear room where Miguel ate and slept of nights.

DAYS flowed into days. Miguel was never so happy, never so joyous. His fiddle was all but forgotten, now, there was so much to talk about. For Don Martin was possessed of an insatiable appetite for information concerning El Tigre—such information as only Miguel, younger brother, could give.

How tall was he? How old was he? Had he scars, or other such markings? How long ago had he begun his notorious career? Where could it be he hid, that no one ever could find him, even after the letters he sent out? And, had Miguel any evidence that would help to braid the crimes of El Tigre into a—well, into jail bars?

So Miguel talked and talked and talked, for here was a superior audience to his common ones, a man who knew the world and whose appreciation of Miguel's flow of oratory was more heady as far as the barber was concerned than even that good *tequila* Don Martin supplied in such abundance.

Talked and talked and talked, the two of them. For ten days little happened but that customers came in, were attended to, lingered to study the placards on the walls and went out. And but that Rita, the goat, had twins, Miguel cut his finger, Pepe the fishmonger found a finger ring in some of his wares, Villa gained fresh victories in the cause of freedom, or some other cause—

Nothing but such things, and the sun shining down on the 'dobe huts and the stone church and the dusty old palms and cactus plants, and the soft, cool nights.

For ten days it was like this, and the only happening in Miguel's life which aroused great interest in the illustrious and most excellent Don Martin was the

occasion when a barefoot peon came in with a carrier-pigeon in a cage, calmly substituted it for a pigeon already in Miguel's possession and went away again.

Don Martin had seen the first pigeon, of course, but there seemed nothing out of the ordinary in a man's keeping a pigeon, even though the fowl did have a little band around one leg.

But the exchange was a different affair and he asked about it.

"Oh," said Miguel, shrugging, and rolling down his lower lip in a way he had when things of which he spoke seemed hardly to merit the words he wasted on them, "his Excellency *el Capitán* Juan José Agromante—of the *rurales, señor*—it is his idea. Ever since the first Mexican reward for my poor brother was posted *el capitán* has been very anxious to meet him. Very anxious. He came many times to see me and to ask me questions. He is so very anxious to see Tino because he has a great admiration and respect for him, he said.

"But I told him that Tino rarely comes to see me and stays only a little while. So he was going to have a messenger stay here to run to tell him when El Tigre arrived, but it seemed so long that he did not come that instead he brought an army pigeon.

"If Tino comes to visit me and it seems a favorable time to introduce him to his excellency the captain—then I have but to release the pigeon and the captain will come."

Don Martin sneered.

"He would betray both thee and thy brother, my friend. As long as the reward reads 'dead or alive' no captain of *rurales* will take any chances. And thee he would probably imprison as an accomplice, to prevent thy trying to claim some of the reward."

Miguel's lip rolled farther down.

"I very much fear, Don Martin, that thou art right. But every week he brings or sends a new pigeon, that the one here may not forget the way to the headquarters. And I feed the one but lightly so that it will be hungry to get home again. As he said to do, of course."

His closing shrug seemed to say that captains of *rurales* are captains of *rurales* and must be humored in their whims, so Don Martin forgot the matter for the while.

IT WAS at the end of those ten monotonous days that the detective seemed to lose interest in the stories about El Tigre and—to kill time, he said—began telling Miguel about fingerprint identification.

Miguel already knew about it, to be sure. Could he not read? Were there not schools which advertised that any clever man—such as Miguel, say—could become an expert of fingerprints and make such fabulous sums as one hundred dollars a week?

But he was nothing if not polite, so he listened courteously to Don Martin's tales of his exploits among crooks and fingerprints and even allowed his own fingerprints to be made, one after the other, so that Don Martin might make illustration of the difference there was between them and those of other people.

And being observing as well as polite, Miguel noted that the paper with his finger prints on it went surreptitiously into Don Martin's pocket, and wondered why, but was not concerned.

That was in the afternoon, during a lull in business. In the evening they visited the café of the Caballos Blancos, and Don Martin won great admiration by the way he fed silver dollars into slot machines. One would have thought, whispered Pepe to Miguel, that the noble señor had of a sudden come into great wealth.

So intent on this sport was Don Martin that he demurred strenuously when Miguel suggested going home at eleven. So it was very late when they walked across the plaza to Miguel's shop and residence, well past midnight, according to the position the great dipper occupied in the northern sky, and Rayo del Sol was asleep.

Don Martin, talkative enough all the

evening, fell suddenly silent as they entered Miguel's house, and remained mute while the lttle barber struck a match and ignited the smoke-begrimed oil lamp that swung from the ceiling of the bedroom-kitchen-dining room.

And all the suavity, all the caressing familiarity, was gone from the señor Don Martin's voice when he did speak. His tone, even more than his words, froze Miguel again into that grim-faced posture of waiting, so that his black eyes burned angrily in an immobile face, and he looked like one who has been cursed with his mother's shame, yet is awaiting his own good time to strike.

"Miguel," said Don Martin, "I find that you have deceived me."

He paused. Miguel, conscious of the fact that he was totally unarmed, that the lamp was beyond reach and that Don Martin's right hand, resting on his hip, was close to the butt of a pistol, waited silently.

"I find, Miguel," said Don Martin, in a voice which made no pretense of kindness, "that the fingerprints you made for me this afternoon are dangerously similiar to some others I have in my possession. Indeed, disastrously similar, Miguel."

He stopped, his Mexican blood giving him a full appreciation of dramatic situations. He smiled broadly; Miguel waited.

"Because, my Miguel," went on Don Martin, "El Tigre was very foolish when he began writing letters. He left his fingerprints on one of them. A full set, Miguel! And those fingerprints are yours!"

If the pronouncement struck terror into Miguel's heart it did not show on his face. For at that moment, indeed, one could very likely have stuck him full of knives and needles without having changed his set expression.

But his heart was sinking, none the less; his whole being was sinking into a pit of chaotic darkness and despair. His stern silence offended his companion, and Don Martin tried vainly to arouse him by taunts and insults.

"So, Don del Lago, you would show haughty scorn when I mentioned giving you part of the reward for El Tigre, would you? Bah!" And that "Don del Lago" was, as Martin Wordsworth well knew, the rankest of insults; for applying the term "don" to a man's last name implies that he is indeed nameless and of obscure birth.

But Miguel waited.

"You would take my money and let me lie here until doomsday, would you? Doubtless because you loved me well, Miguel?"

Miguel waited.

"And so, my little one," went on Martin Wordsworth, "you shall tonight go with me across the border, very peacefully, and I shall arrest you for the crimes of El Tigre—and tomorrow or next day your friends will marvel how bloody a soul was hidden under a barber's palaver and beard-trimming."

But his friends, could they have seen Miguel at the moment, as his eyes played over Wordsworth's face, would not have marveled to find him guilty of any sanguinary doings.

He spoke and some of the tenseness left his face.

"And, Don Martin, if I do not go peacefully across the border with you? If I raise an outcry?"

Wordsworth shrugged.

"The reward on this side, *compañero*, is given dead or alive, you know."

But Miguel was not foolish. He smiled with a brave show of unconcern and said:

"And you know, Don Martin, how likely you are to get it. The *rurales* are fond of rewards themselves."

Which was the joker in the deck, of course. Miguel must be taken alive across the border if Wordsworth were to profit in the States, and the chances were few that he would under any circumstances profit at all in Mexico.

He hadn't counted on Miguel's acting as he was acting, of course, but had—supreme in his high opinion of his prowess—taken it for granted that the little man would do as he was told. And since

the hour was so late it seemed improbable that there would be any one about to interfere with the plans.

But Miguel, for all his stoic face, was most unhappy. He was thinking with furious haste and in hectic circles. Life was not unpleasant, but any business dealing he had with his one-time friend, el Señor Don Martin, seemed likely to be.

He must dash out the light and escape or go with Don Martin and try to escape on the road or try to persuade Don Martin to let him go. Since none of these plans seemed entirely feasible, he by all means must spar for time.

So it was not strange that his furious thinking, for which he was entirely unfitted by practise and by inclination, brought him directly to the telling of the plain, cold, unadorned truth. For this too he was unfitted both by practise and inclination, as are most *raconteurs;* but for the once it must suffice.

Thus it was the truth that he told; the simple truth of a not flattering procedure of his. And he told it hesitantly and poorly, but with such absolute honesty in his eyes that he was not to be misbelieved by any man as clever as el Señor Don Martin.

YEARS ago, explained Miguel, shamefaced and crestfallen, when he had first opened his shop in Rayo del Sol, he had been constantly annoyed by gangs of loafers and joy-making *vaqueros,* who had taken him to be a spiritless fellow and a fit subject for their jests and pranks.

They had been many to one, to be sure, and that one a friendless newcomer, but it had been business acumen rather than cowardice which had led Miguel to duplicity in dealing with them. Continual brawling would have put his place in ill repute and made him enemies where he needed friends.

He possessed a tremendous old two-edged dagger and some ability at throwing it. He practised the art of tossing it until he could sink it deep in a mark that might be covered by the hand, and this from a distance of ten paces.

So he fell to giving exhibitions of knife-throwing and to telling tales of the escapades of his renegade brother Constantino whom—said Miguel—men called El Tigre because of his thirst for blood and his blind rages when crossed.

It was no less than marvelous how well the device worked, Miguel confessed. This was, to be sure, because of his dramatic ability and skill with words. Every one accepted the purely fictional brother at face value. Respect for Miguel grew apace; interest in his stories of El Tigre's doings brought audiences and money.

"So," said Don Martin at this point, "having found it easy to create a desperado brother you thought it also easy to be a desperado?"

"*Por Dios,* no!" protested Miguel, lifting his eyes to heaven in a pious appeal for belief.

Then he went on to say that the adventures of El Tigre had drawn so much patronage and so much esteem for him that he would have been a poor fool to have ceased telling of them.

Had not Miguel so greatly wanted time to devise a good plan and had not Don Martin probed him again and again with searching questions he might have cut short the explanation there. Because he was no little ashamed to tell how intricate his duplicity had become and how much of his life had been explained by the necessity of atoning for the sins of a hell-bent brother.

So, feeling as soft and foolish as a shell-less snail, Miguel further confessed that he had begun the practise of burning candles for El Tigre's dead to make it appear that all the tales were true. And that he had taken to claiming for El Tigre every unsolved murder and robbery anywhere around; that he had come so to love this delightful rogue of a non-existent brother that he more than half believed the tales himself.

That in the end, further to lend verisimilitude to the fiction, he had even written the letters—and thus included the all-important fingerprints. He had

always mailed those letters in Juarez or other points distant from Rayo del Sol. That was, in fact, why he had wanted the motorcycle.

"So, you see, señor," he concluded apologetically. "You see."

But a great load was off his heart, for the truth was out and he was safe. Don Martin would go away now. Perhaps Miguel would be laughed out of town, but then—that would be a small penalty.

YET DON MARTIN did not go. Instead, he stood a moment in silence, his hand still just above his pistol butt and a queer little smile playing over his face. Miguel waited anxiously for the word that would announce his freedom from this quasi-bondage.

Then his rising hopes sank like lead in a well. Wordsworth said—

"Well, my Miguel, are you ready now to go with me?" And there was a vast deal that was unpleasant in the way he said it.

The mask of stony hardness came over Miguel's face. Through it he said—

"But, Excellency, do you not believe me?"

Don Martin lifted his shoulders lazily.

"What I believe makes no difference, Miguel. It is what a court will believe. You are the man who made the fingerprints I have; for me, that is enough."

"I see," said Miguel slowly. "I see. You believe me. And you would sell me for the reward. For five thousand dollars. Yet you believe me."

Don Martin was shameless. No flush of guilt diffused itself over his broad face; no tear of remorse stood in his eyes. Had Miguel known that it was because of similar affairs in San Antonio that Don Martin had become a private instead of a headquarters detective he would not have been so surprized at the lack of feeling displayed.

"Capitan Agromante would be pleased to discover what I know about you," suggested Don Martin, suavely as ever. "Or you can come with me across the border, as you wish."

Miguel knew well enough the prompt and effective measures Agromante sometimes used in putting eternal bonds on the bodies of men for whom there were rewards, but he had heard of even more harrowing fates than death being perpetuated upon Mexicans who got in trouble north of the line. Tales of the third degree with its natural inhumanities considerably colored in the telling.

Between a known and an unknown terror he chose the former. If he must die he would die quickly in front of a firing squad, not of starvation in a gringo prison. And he said, out of that pit of despair into which his hopes had sunk, and through his expressionless mask of a face:

"I will not go." Then stoutly he added, "May you burn a million years! May your wife deceive you. May your children be born blind and idiotic!"

As if Miguel's words were a lash on his back Wordswoth's smile departed. His air of leisure left with equal abruptness; he jerked out the pistol. He snapped out the command—

"Get that pigeon!"

Miguel obeyed.

"Open the cage and take him out! If you as much as ruffle a feather el Capitán Agromante will get you dead!"

Miguel obeyed.

"Toss him out of the window!"

Miguel obeyed and stood like a bronze image awaiting further commands.

"Now," said Wordsworth venomously. "You have perhaps five minutes to go peacefully with me. Or you may wait for Agromante to come."

"I wait," said Miguel, folding his hands.

Then soberly he crossed himself and muttered a prayer, resigning himself to death. Wordsworth's threats thereafter fell on ears that were deaf to them. Miguel was ready to die.

But because Wordsworth would not shoot, even to carry out his threats, Miguel lived for the time. For while Miguel lived there was a chance that Wordsworth could have him extradited.

WHAT would have happened had the pigeon faltered on its flight may not be known. Anything might have happened and probably would have. But the bird flew truly, came at once into the trap and was at once obtained by the man that watched there for all pigeons.

And Agromante had sat late entertaining friends. He was as ready for duty as his cups would let him be, since he was rather well gone in those cups. So it was not more than fifteen minutes after Miguel released the bird before the shutters were yanked from the two windows and carbines were thrust in to command the situation and there was a tremendous battering at the door.

It burst in, and a rabble of *rurales* flooded the rooms, because the Captain Agromante had indeed great respect for El Tigre, even as Miguel had said.

The captain came on the heels of his men, his sword belted around him and his pistol drawn. Miguel scarcely noticed him or his men. What difference could anything make?

"Ah!" said Agromante expansively, with a decided thickness of tongue, as he bowed gallantly in Wordsworth's direction.

"Here is your man," began Wordsworth. "I have—"

"Shut up, you mangy thief and murderer!" said the captain—strong with the strength of ten because his heart was pure—and twice ten of his men were around him. Wordsworth recoiled in horror.

"What?"

"Throw down your pistol!" snapped Agromante. But the weapon clung to the detective's fingers.

El capitán gestured. Many men leaped on Wordsworth, snatching the weapon from his grasp and holding firmly to his arms.

"You drunken fool!" howled Wordsworth, his face dark with rage, wrenching so hard to free himself that he all but succeeded.

"So?" asked Agromante in a very pleasant tone for such a very unpleasant, short, greasy person. "So?"

He beckoned another man to his side, and to him he said—

"If he speaks again—" The purposely unfinished sentence was significant enough, but Wordsworth was lost in his anger. He opened his mouth; the *rurale* flung up his carbine and the butt crashed brutally into Wordsworth's face. He stood mutely then, and Agromante turned his pleasant-toned speech to Miguel, who was just coming to see that the blessed saints indeed do protect the faithful. His spirits and speech were rising to this heaven-sent opportunity.

"A thousand thanks, Excellency!" breathed Miguel ecstatically, falling upon his knees before *el capitán*. "In another moment he would have killed me, Excellency. A thousand thanks! May the good saints shower their blessings upon you as I shall pray them to do! May—"

"Ah!" smiled Agromante, seemingly greatly touched by Miguel's devout worship of him. "A trifle, my friend. Is it not for such things that I am an official? And will you come in the morning to swear that this is your brother, the infamous El Tigre?"

"Indeed, Excellency," returned the still kneeling Miguel. However, he was not by any means returning all his thanks to the captain.

"And the reward, the reward—" suggested Agromante, waving his hand hazily before his face in a futile attempt to twist his mustache, but by no means too drunk to think of business.

"Is your Excellency's," finished Miguel, at once. "I could no more think of taking any credit for his capture than I could think of taking blood money for a brother, *caballero!*"

He arose and his brilliant hard eyes took their pleasure in Wordsworth's mutilated face.

"And, Excellency," he added, "I have this night declared that my brother shall henceforth be as one dead to me. Yet my heart softens against him, for he is my brother. I had vowed that the buzzards might pick his bones or the dogs defile his grave and I would not lift a hand. But—

but my heart softens now that he comes to his doom.

"Thus, Excellency, should he be so unfortunate as to die while in your keeping, I would feel it my duty to make you heir to whatever sums he may have about him and to which I would be the natural heir. And to pay you in addition— Let me see. Yes, I would feel it my duty to pay you the sum of one hundred dollars *Americano*, to relieve you of his funeral expenses."

Then Don Martin was dragged away, his hands bound behind him by one end of a *riata*, the noose of the other end about his throat, while stout hands held the bight.

MIGUEL was left to telling his beads and to recounting all his prayers; he even invented new ones that his saints and his Lady might properly be thanked and he wondered just how long before he would be laughed out of Rayo del Sol.

Yet he was early astir and had learned much gratifying news before Pepe came bursting in upon him as he sat at breakfast.

"*Dios! Por Dios y todos los santos!* I have just heard, Miguel! So thy brother at last is taken!"

It was five minutes before Pepe had even begun to exhaust himself of expletives and exclamations. At last his face fell, and he concluded soberly—

"But now, my friend, thou wilt be off to the wars with Villa." He whispered the last word, but forgot to look around before he said it.

Miguel, who had thought of this point among the other glad thoughts of the morning, assumed an air of great sadness.

"*Ay de mí*, Pepe, thou hast not heard all. My poor, unfortunate brother was shot early this morning while trying to escape. Alas! Trial by flight is frequently invoked, to be sure. One can not give Agromante great credit for it because he only copied what many another had done.

"And so," wailed Miguel, as his sorrows came more heavily upon him, "I am for many years yet chained to my barber's chair. For Tino died unshrived, like any yelping cur, and it will be long enough before he can be gotten through Purgatory!

"Thus, you see, even now he binds me, Pepe, as he always has. For by the time his soul is shrived I shall be too old for fighting any more. What an infamous thing to be brother to such a man!"

THE GATE OF LIFE

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

THE LITTLE column raced over the naked immensity of the plain toward the infinite northern horizon. The sand was churned behind the hundred and fifty camels as the surface of a calm sea by the screw of a steamer.

A khaki-and-buff caravan, abloom with the blood-red *chechias* of the negro soldiers, gleaming with polished steel, fluttering with multicolored rags. Eighty riflemen, twenty Moorish camel drivers, four white men, forming a pursuit detachment from the post of Birek in Mauretania, commanded by Captain Louis Dorliac, *Mehariste** of France.

Three weeks before, fifteen miles from the loopholed walls of Birek, raiders had surprized and massacred a French patrol guarding camels at pasture. The detachment had for its mission to overhaul, engage and destroy them. Somewhere ahead, on the fringe of the desolate plateau of Zemul, fled five-score Ouled Rekabats, one hundred gaunt warriors from the Saharan interior, armed with modern weapons, mounted on choice beasts, piloted by Modhani ben Ismael.

Captain Dorliac, a lanky man of thirty, clad in a loose khaki tunic beneath a red-lined cloak, fitted his job as a sword blade fits its scabbard. He had served his desert apprenticeship in the hard school of the Zinder group, north of Chad. The brown beard that lengthened his bronzed face gave him the aspect of a dour Pan, a first impression that was dispelled when the glance was met, steady, thoughtful, deceptively gentle.

Suddenly his braided sleeve shot forward.

"Fadama! Fasten that machine-gun. It will be off in a moment."

He halted to see that the task was accomplished. The machine-gun gave him his sole advantage in the expected encounter, and a machine-gun that has struck the sand, even in its canvas

*Member of the camel troops.

A Lost Officer of the French Colonials in Africa

By GEORGES SURDEZ

jacket is likely to choke at the wrong moment.

Fadama, a giant Bambra sergeant from the Kita district, obeyed swiftly, assisted by his men. He looked up, saluted.

"*Paré, mon capitaine.*"

"If it happens again, off go your stripes! Go on!"

The machine-gun group moved on ahead, and Dorliac drew up even with his second, Lieutenant Ternay.

Ternay was twenty-four, massively built, his young, sensitive face already graven with deep lines of fatigue, clear blue eyes under heavy brows, a small mustache above mobile lips. He appeared excited, eager—too eager.

"Take it easy," Dorliac advised him. "At this rate, you won't last."

Ternay grinned nervously. "All right, Captain."

"Those fellows have no more than forty-eight hours advance on us," Dorliac reassured him. "We'll catch them."

"The —— pack-camels slow us up."

"The camels they captured are not an unmixed lot, either. We will reach them somewhere around the Hamram well."

He raised his hand, ordered a slacking of the pace. He knew that the art of gaging his rate of progress would spell success or failure of his trip. An occasional amble proved almost a rest.

Taking the lead again, he rode with the point riders commanded by a French sergeant, Gros. A nice fellow, Gros, dependable and intelligent. Eight or nine years service, five in the colonies. His good, round, honest farmer's face, phlegmatically calm—the calm of a man who knows what he is about—was comforting to behold.

"Better get back, Captain," Gros suggested. "This is where the first bullets will strike and you'll be needed."

"We can see to the horizon in every direction. I'll get back when necessary, don't fret. What do you think of the men?"

"The blacks are all right; no better, no worse, than the general run. I wouldn't trust the Moorish camelmen too far; at heart they're with the chaps ahead of us."

"My opinion, too."

The conversation ended.

THE SUN was circling in a sky flecked with a white fleece of tiny clouds, and the shadows were lengthening, fantastic, distorted violet shapes, a file of fleeting monsters, flat against the tawny soil. Crumbling piles of grayish-red sandstone emerged here and there, like rocks piercing through the surface of a lake.

To Dorliac this was not a new scene, though nine years had elapsed since he had been in this region. It seemed to him now that he was rediscovering himself as he was at twenty, with the fresh impressions, the love of space, the daring that is youth. Now, a captain; before, a lad of twenty-one, fresh from France, exposing a brand new single stripe to the sun.

That first sojourn in Mauretania had been broken into by the war. He had been dispatched home, arriving at the end of August, '14, during the great agony of the German advance upon Paris. He had been at the Marne, had been wounded. When he left the hospital, after weeks of treatment, he had been reassigned to colonial service, one of a handful of officers leading native partisans, flung before the rising tide of Moslem fanatics. He had taken part in the long struggle to hold the desert. Silent, lonely years, gone unrewarded, invisible to eyes dazzled by the greater struggle at home. Then, once more, Mauretania.

Dorliac shrugged. There must be plugs to fit all holes. He had served where needed as best he could. And he had been lucky enough to come out alive. Yet how far behind was that space of time when he had followed this same route to the Hamram well, to seek for possible survivors of Major Legastel's group, surprized and killed by these same Ouled Rekabats.

Surprized and massacred. Often those words followed the names of Frenchmen fallen fighting against the desert people. Flatters, Bonnier, the rest, all experienced soldiers, surprized and massacred. And even Legastel, the ideal Saharan, Budaken, as the Moors called him, the Man with the Beard, vanished at Hamram!

Nine years gone, Legastel had taken a detachment in the very region where he, Dorliac, was going. A smaller, less efficient group, composed of new recruits from the Sudan, negroes freshly incorporated into the camel-mounted forces. But, as they were led by Legastel, the lucky, there had been no fear felt.

A figure of legend, the major. It had not been Dorliac's good fortune to see him in the flesh, but he had heard much of him. He had seen his photograph, dominating others in the group by the bulk of his shoulders, a splendid man with a black beard in which always glinted the whiteness of a smile.

Yet Legastel had gone when his turn had come. Gone with little fuss and no glory, as others had gone before, as others had gone since. A short skirmish before dawn, the tent ropes severed by long knives, falling on the white leaders. Empty magazines, the men separated from their cartridges, a whirl of naked figures curling near the bayonets, butts rising and falling, and all was over.

The punitive column, in which Dorliac had taken part, had struck a void. Scurrying patrols had raced toward mounds of rocks from which shots had come, and returned empty-handed, the marksman apparently swallowed by the sand. From time to time a slithering sound, the thump of a body to the ground, a kicking camel, followed by the distant whip-crack of a rifle. Thin smoke shredding far off in the sun's glare. Nothing more.

Later, vague rumors had come to Birek, brought by passing caravans—surly camelmen answering questions laconically. The strength of the Ouled Rekabats? Anywhere from fifty to three hundred. Had Legastel been taken alive?

Some said yes; others, no. But all declared he was dead. All agreed that the instigator of the stroke had been Modhani ben Ismael, a young Moor, scarcely a man, who, as the nephew of a famed holy man of Islam, held an almost mystic prestige among his people.

The French knew Modhani. He had come, the only youth among a delegation of white-beards, to discuss terms for his race, with the St. Louis officials. Every one was struck by his intelligence, but displeased by his arrogance. He had left, feeling himself slighted, and from that day had dated his hatred of the French.

His enmity for Legastel had been more than racial and religious. Legastel, famed and respected among his own tribe, had been a rival. Months before the Hamram catastrophe, Modhani had sworn that he would break Budaken. Building his career on the killing of a great warrior from overseas, Modhani had climbed swiftly.

And it was this same Modhani that Dorliac was going out to match wits against, now older, craftier and no less cruel, a leader who seemed inspired to discover the weak spot in a defense, the time when vigilance relaxed. He struck deftly, fiercely, silently. And then he would vanish into his own realm, breathing defiance to the Europeans, stirring in the pacified tribes the slumbering, inbred lust for carnage and loot.

Modhani had with him at least one hundred men, armed with magazine rifles. At his call, hundreds more would rise from the ground. The French column numbered one hundred-odd men, twenty of them auxiliaries of the same extraction as his foes, armed with old carbines transformed from rifles into smooth-bores by long usage, guns that could be trusted as little as their owners.

The margin of safety was the machine-gun, an uncertain weapon in a land where automatic arms lasted but a brief space.

"See anything, Captain?" Sergeant Rombier inquired.

Dorliac started, then relaxed into a smile—to his credit, a confident smile.

"No. I was thinking."

He lifted his hand and gestured quickly.

The detachment picked up speed and raced on.

THE MAN who has been brought up within walls is tempted when camping under the stars to pitch his tent close to some natural shelter. When the time came for the halt, Ternay, forgetting what the book of theories had taught him, suggested that a large heap of sandstone, looming a couple of miles off, would form an ideal shield against the rising wind.

"In the desert a rock or ledge forms a very practical concealment for an approaching attacking party," Dorliac informed him. "We left Birek three days ago, have passed out from the hills. Our real danger starts now. Modhani, with the open before him, can send ahead the stolen camels under a small escort and turn back to deal with us."

Dorliac selected an open spot, dominating the general level of soil. Gros had taken charge, sent out parties of negroes to gather firewood and the spiny branches to form the protective fence, the *zeriba*.

A picturesque, busy scene, at the same time rustic and martial. The half-nude laborers; the sentries, rifles in hand, puttees neatly rolled around their calves, their bare feet in sandals; the Moorish camelmen taking care of the beasts. Dorliac passed a rapid inspection.

Gros reported:

"Private Moriba Niake's lost cartridges. Mamory Be has neglected to mend his saddle. Otherwise, all well."

The cooks were at work over the fires. A little to one side the Moors were preparing their meals, leisurely. The small tea-kettles were steaming. After a meager supper, Dorliac rolled cigarets, while Ternay smoked gold-tips from a fast-dwindling stock. As ordered by Dorliac, no tent was erected. A tent would indicate where the white leaders could be found, whether the Moors came with the

steel or fired from afar. After night fell, Dorliac was content to drape a blanket over his shoulders, and Ternay imitated him.

The preceding evenings the captain had been too busy outlining his plans, the route to be followed, various dispositions in case of combat, to allow the conversation to drift. Of Ternay he knew very little, what he had heard of him from others, vague estimates gathered in the casual talk at the mess-table. It was likely he would spend several weeks with Ternay for sole company. He sought now to get into more personal contact. Ternay, who felt the loneliness even more than he, was eager to talk.

"I've heard that you have been in Mauretania before, Captain."

"For a few months. Years ago."

"You've been to the Hamram well?"

"Yes."

"What sort of a place is it?"

"Hamram? Nothing very striking. A few feet deeper than other holes around here, so that a counter-weight rig has been placed there by the Moors, to bring up the buckets. Date-palms, sand—nothing. As it is very far from the old route from Morocco to Sudan, no building has ever been erected. It has a certain importance for, once in a while, various bunches of Moors meet near it to trade horses, sheep, camels and the usual articles."

"That's where Major Legastel was killed—"

"Yes."

He was surprized and pleased that Ternay had taken the trouble to study past operations in the vicinity. Legastel and his end were a pretty old story and few of the newcomers had heard or cared.

"Is there any sort of monument to, in a way, commemorate his last stand?"

Dorliac smiled.

"What could there be? A cross? The Moors would knock it down. A headstone? Rather heavy to bring here on a camel. And where would we place it? Legastel's body was never found. And, anyway, he wouldn't have cared for any such thing."

"Others might."

"His wife and family, yes. Later on, when we are masters in this region, something may be done."

"For myself, I'd just as soon be left where I fall, buried or not," Ternay explained. "But I spoke with Madame Legastel before coming out, and she asked me—to—sort of—you know what a woman would ask."

"We'll take snapshots of the well, of the nearest landmarks. That will be little enough, but what more can we do?"

Ternay went on to explain:

"Madame Legastel and my mother are in some way related. You know, provincial families are clannish, and make much of an alliance centuries back. Madame Legastel spent several summers with us while her husband was away."

"Did you ever see him?"

"Once. He'd usually wire her to meet him in Paris. He had no use for quiet when he was in France—said he had enough rural life in the colonies."

"Legastel had rather an interesting career," Dorliac offered.

"Yes," Ternay declared, glowing. "From the first he was marked for the army. Born in Paris during the siege, with the guns rattling the window panes. Entered the Military School at eighteen, graduated at twenty, third in his class, served first in the Zouaves. Then in the Algerian Turcos. Went to Indo-China. Fought at the relief of Tuyan-Quan, and was wounded. Back to France.

"In the Sudan for two years. Madagascar next, where he contracted fever. Left the army for a space. Married, tried politics. His ways were not the right ones for the game. Stifling with inaction he resumed service, in the Foreign Legion. Served as captain on the Chinese border, decorated, officer of the Legion of Honor at thirty-four, which meant more in those days than now.

"The *Meharistes* attracted him, always. He finally obtained his assignment to Mauretania. I always heard of Mauretania. His wife used to read his letters to us and I, being a kid, got interested. You

know, both his wife and daughter worship his memory—"

"He had children?"

"Two. The son was killed in 'seventeen, in Alsace. His daughter is still alive."

"Oh," thought Dorliac, "I begin to understand."

"Madame Legastel could have married again, but she did not. Now, she's more or less engaged. She's over forty, but one of the most beautiful women in France."

It seemed to Dorliac that Madame Legastel wanted to make certain that her husband was firmly under stone before contracting a new alliance. But he refrained from speaking, unwilling to shock young Ternay. Moreover, signs pointed to a nearer relationship in the future. Therefore, he kept his cynical comments to himself.

Dorliac laid his hand on the lieutenant's sleeve, in a friendly impulsive gesture.

"It seemed more or less necessary to your happiness that you, too, should follow the roads followed by the respected sire, didn't it? But of all the queer reasons—"

Ternay laughed.

"In any case, you see, Mademoiselle Legastel and I could not get married until she was twenty-one. Just why is too long to explain, Some reason of her family, an inheritance hanging on it, or something. That is two years off—and I might as well employ them toward promotion."

"Illusions of youth—the colonies the right place for promotion! Why not some job as secretary in a minister's staff?"

"That would have proved harder in certain ways," Ternay said, seriously. "I dislike confinement."

"I was thinking of Legastel this very afternoon," Dorliac went on. "With enough logic, I admit. His name is connected with what is probably my greatest emotion. I was at Birek when the first tidings of his death came. No one would believe it, but it was soon confirmed by new reports. They spoke of him at mess with lowered breath. They discussed his good points, his ability. I was permitted to go with the column that went to pick up the corpses.

"We reached Hamram in record time, teeth clenched, hands sweating on rifle stocks. There was nothing for us to fight. After considerable searching we found the bones of several negroes, a few metal buttons, empty cartridges, then, two hundred yards away from the well, the body of one French sergeant—what the vultures had left of it.

"We sought long for Legastel. His body was undoubtedly not very far away, but we gave up. The fight, after the initial surprize, seemed to have strung out for five or six miles. Unless we patiently turned over some twenty-five square kilometers of sand, we could not locate him. We had neither men nor time enough. We did capture a Moor, who claimed to have seen him killed. But later, others said that he had been taken away to be tortured and killed a day's march away."

Dorliac lit another cigaret, smiled grimly.

"Unfortunately for that first informer we found on him fifty of our cartridges, a Lebel rifle and, in the folds of his dirty garments, a little kit, comprising needles, thread, safety-pins.

"They were recognized as having belonged to one of the sergeants. It was a pitiful satisfaction to shoot him, particularly as he was the most composed fellow around until he dropped. None of us felt gratified or elated by his death.

"We arranged the bones in what we thought a fairly accurate order, and one of our blacks, a *marabout*, read the Koran. A sergeant recited prayers over his dead comrade who had been a Breton and a good Catholic. Then came the military rites. It was awful and mournful, that emptiness, the palms, the camel dung and the bones, all mixed up in our minds.

"When we believed everything was over, our chief suddenly turned to us. 'Present arms!' Then he faced north, touched the brim of his helmet in salute—it is never wise to bare one's head under the sun—and he spoke to Legastel. Not

of him. *To* him. He stood there, talking into space, told him that we all knew that he had found the resting place he himself would have chosen, had died the death he would have desired, far in the van of other Frenchmen, leading the way to create greater France.

"He told him that wherever his body was, the soil was sacred to France. That he would serve as inspiration and model to us all. That no man present would forget him and that we would all try to be worthy of having gazed on the spot of his death.

"Empty words, in a way, such as you see in various newspaper obituaries. But they sounded better out there, addressed to a worthy man, one who had forsaken home for France and was to have no grave.

"The tears trickled down my face, and I was choking, dizzy. I could see a white sergeant, standing very straight, hands holding his rifle, with the bright tip of the bayonet waving, trembling. The negroes, stolid and accustomed to accepting our rites as another form of drill, were solemn, impressed, uneasy.

"We were all sort of limp when the order to ground arms was given. We marched away, unwilling to avail ourselves of the comfort of the well and its date-palms. The bugles' notes eddied into the heat, and we left—to stay after those words would have seemed a profanation."

"I have never heard of that," Ternay murmured.

"It was among ourselves—others probably forgot, as I did, that there were those who would want to know such details."

"I will write only what is best for her to know."

"If you wish. It was a long while ago—but it may still interest Madame Legastel." Dorliac rose and stretched. "We'll take a look around together. Then Gros will be in charge. We rise at four, you know."

"At four?"

"Yes. And we start out soon after, halt before noon and spend the afternoon resting. Tomorrow night we travel on. It will be light enough and cooler than in the full glare. And traveling at night does away with the possibility of a surprize at dawn."

WITHIN a few miles of Hamram well, Dorliac ordered fighting formation. He left the Moorish auxiliaries, eight negroes and Sergeant Gros with the pack-camels, dispatching Lieutenant Ternay on the right with sixteen men, Sergeant Rombier on the left with a like number. He himself, with the men left him, had advanced in open order, riders five yards apart, rifles ready, each man with two hand grenades in his *musette*.

Finding the well unoccupied, the square was formed, the pit forming almost the exact center of the quadrangle of camels and baggage inside the *zeriba* of spiny bushes.

There were fresh traces everywhere showing that the raiding party had left but a few hours before, probably to travel during the night. Not far off a dead camel was stiffening. Dorliac went to examine it.

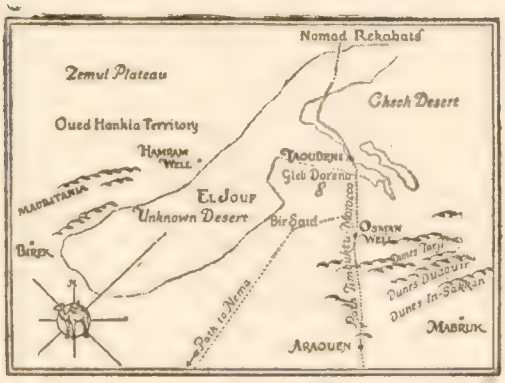
"We're on the right track," he said to Ternay. "Government brand, one of the beasts captured near Birek. The stolen camels will burden them. They had just returned from a long trip to the Rio del Oro border and had little time to recuperate. From now on we'll be able to trace the Rekabats by the carcasses, unless they abandon all of the stolen animals for us to pick up, which would be an admission of defeat for Modhani."

At noon Sergeant Rombier returned. He had circled northwest to a grazing ground known to be in the vicinity, where water gathered during the rains left sufficient moisture to grow grass. Rombier, a short, wiry young man who had won decorations and stripes in Syria, brought back two prisoners. Tied behind the saddles of his men were several slaughtered lambs which, he said, would improve their fare of tinned meat.

"As you said, Captain, there were sheep in the marshy ground north of

here," he reported. "I decided to pick up one or two herders on the chance they might have heard something. The first fellow we spotted saw us soon enough to get away. The next, that young one over there, tried to duck, too, but I shot a couple of rounds near his heels and he stopped. Then, much farther, I saw the old man there, waiting for us, calm as brass, as if asleep. He doesn't know much, evidently, but I brought him along."

The shepherds around Hamram were Ouled Hankia. Before the arrival of the



French in Mauretania, the tribe was constantly at war with the Rekabats. When a common enemy appeared, however, they called a truce.

The herders were a queer lot, living away from the villages which were hidden beyond the reach of attack, very old men, mere lads or cripples, none of them of high estate in their own race. The two captives were clad alike in a sort of blue sack that left the lower limbs exposed. The first was a youth with a strain of negro blood evident.

He was badly frightened and thought his last hour had come. He replied to questions in Adrar Arabic, so mixed with local Berber words that the captain asked Falike, a veteran corporal, a Bambara who had been in Mauretania fourteen years, to serve as interpreter.

"His name is Hokal. He says that many men were at the well yesterday. How many? He does not know—Modhani one of them. Yes, he knows Modhani by sight. Where are they going? That way—" Falike indicated the east. "He says he knows nothing more. Nothing. He says please not to kill him, Captain."

"He has nothing to fear if he has told the truth," Dorliac retorted.

Falike translated.

"He swear he no lie, Captain."

"All right. Tell him we'll keep him a while; then he can go back to his sheep. Bring the next man."

The second captive was brought forward. Long gray hair fell to his shoulders, framing a swarthy face ending in a flowing white beard. But the forearms and the legs emerging from his ragged blue clothing were still muscled, the dark skin taut over the sinews. His stare made him appear almost blind; a sort of veil clouded his black pupils.

"*Teraff tetkalem Arabi?*" Dorliac asked.

"Yes, I speak Arabic as thou dost," the old man replied in that tongue.

"Thy name? Thy tribe?"

"I am Yusuf of the Hankia."

"Thou dost know what we are, Yusuf?"

"You are Franks."

"Right. No harm shall come to thee. But tell us—warriors of the Rekabats passed here yesterday. How many and who was their chief?"

"The lad spoke the truth."

"Good. Now we know that Modhani sent a message to you shepherds, for you to transmit by word of mouth to your tribe. What did he speak?"

"They said that they had killed many of your negroes and two Franks, chiefs both."

"That is the truth. Are they going toward the rising sun, as the lad said?"

"So they spoke."

"Say thou, when talking to me, 'Sidi Captain,'" Dorliac reproved him. "Toward the rising sun?"

"Yes, Sidi Captain."

"Why should they go there?"

"To obey the will of Allah."

"It may be the will of Allah that thou wilt be flogged, old Yusuf!"

"If Allah wills."

Dorlic could perceive that the old man felt no fear.

"Come, thou art old, therefore very wise. One has but to see thy beard to know thy wisdom. I, who am young, ask thee. Why?"

"Toward the rising sun is the Jouf. They know that Frankish soldiers never follow them into the Jouf, while, had they gone north, you'd have followed."

"What will they do after they have crossed the land of Jouf?"

"Their tents are on the other side of Jouf. There they will leave their loot and seek more loot elsewhere, near to Taoudeni."

"They are too few to raid the big *kaffila*—caravan—of salt.

"After the great salt caravan leaves Taoudeni there are smaller ones which, for one reason or another, could not go with the first. In all things there must be those that are great, those not so great and others very small. What the lion leaves is found by the jackals."

"Wisely said. But our *mektubs*—writings, maps—do not show the water-holes of the Jouf. Yet will we follow."

"That is not wise. Across the Jouf from here is five days' journey, broken by but one well. It is a bad well and the Rekabats will dry it with their mouths. It will not be filled again for three days. Your soldiers will find it empty and die."

"On this road, you say. There must be other wells elsewhere, south or north."

"Yes, but that will lose two days."

Dorliac was silent. The Jouf, unknown to Europeans, was presumed to be an immense depression lower than sea level. The passage of the Ouled Rekabats would dry the meager supply of water. He either had to consent to the further sacrifice of two days' time, or risk disaster. Modhani would believe the pursuit had been abandoned, would slacken his pace on the other side and be off guard. And Dorliac had instructions to keep after Modhani.

Yusuf could be employed as guide. In that capacity, he would share the fate of the French troopers, therefore, it would be to his interest to lead them well. At the first hint of a trap, he was aware that he would be executed. Though brave and loyal to their race, there were few examples of Moors who had sacrificed themselves thus.

"Thou shalt come with us," Dorliac informed Yusuf.

"I know little," protested Yusuf. "And my sheep?"

"Thy sheep or us? I must choose." He turned to Falike. "Feed these men; give them water, but do not allow them to stray far."

After the Bambara had taken the prisoner away Dorliac gathered the white men about him and informed them of his decision. Ternay and Rambier accepted cheerfully. Gros, the only one who knew what crossing the Jouf might mean—he had once been lost in the southern outskirts when out with a patrol—was bold enough to speak his opinion.

"Saving your respect, Captain, we're likely to croak out there."

"My instructions are to push the pursuit to the limit. To circle the Jouf would consume weeks, and then the bunch we seek would have evaporated into their own territory, scattered."

"I just gave my idea, Captain. You're the chief."

"It will be somewhat of a stunt to be the first Frenchmen to do it!" Ternay put in, glowingly.

"Come on—an old soldier like you, Gros."

"Oh, that's all right, Captain, that's all right. But remember I warned you."

Dorliac laughed and brought out his watch.

"One o'clock. We start at nightfall, as usual. Gros, I believe it's your turn on guard. The rest of is had best get some sleep."

A strip of canvas had been stretched on sticks beneath the cluster of date-palms. The noon wind, dry and hot, stirred the stifling air, redolent with negro sweat, camel stenches and greasy emanations from the cooking food of the Moorish auxiliaries. The blankets were inhabited

by the fauna invariably accompanying desert men. Yet they were soon asleep, worn by nineteen hours of waking, twelve of which had been spent on the march.

CROSSING the Jouf diagonally, the detachment moved forward as if in a nightmare of solitude. Tall yellow dunes, similar to those found in the Iguidi; and at certain other stretches, immense elongated heaps, white and loose as flour, in which even the camels sunk deep. A snowy fog of dust rose, filling eyes, mouth and nose, seeping down into every pocket, trickling from the collar into the boots. Days baked by the sun; nights frozen by the wind.

The single water-hole which was found supplied enough drink for the men, and an emergency ration for the camels. Three of the negroes died, from fear and fatigue quite as much as from thirst. They lay down and would not get up. Threats, kicks, even a prod with the tip of the bayonet, failed to move them. Strapped on camels, they lingered a few hours. On the sixth day camels began to drop until a score had gone. Part of the baggage had to be abandoned.

The Moorish auxiliaries, tough and accustomed to long drought, stood the test of endurance better, but protested when Dorliac tried to increase the water ration of the blacks. The captain could not make them comprehend that the negroes needed more fluid than they. He saw plainly that, should he persist in his plan, even though he himself were willing to take the shorter ration, the camelmen would rebel, and perhaps make off with the camels they rode.

In contrast with the floury waste came the sooty spreads. The black dust was not thick over the soil, but the progress of the column was marked by a broad gray-white stretch against the sable soil. Sand was everywhere—in the water, in the food, under the fingernails, in one's ears. There was of course no thought of water for ablutions. Dorliac saw Ternay's face gradually darken, his clean-shaven cheeks cover with a fine dark stubble, the lines of his face thicken with caked dirt. He saw Rombier looking like a pirate in his torn uniform; Gros, surly and courageous.

Then three of the Moors deserted, taking with them several of the camels laden with water skins. They suddenly left the tail of the detachment and raced away in a compact, determined lot. Dorliac ordered a volley fired. One fell. The other two vanished. The next day the water allowance was cut still lower. A pint and a half a day for each man.

Dorliac's lips were dry and cracked. The roof of his mouth glowed like an oven. He had violent colic that bent him double, swift rushes of blood to the brain. At times he would glance at the full skins with a mad longing to drink his fill. When he tried to ascertain his position by compass or the stars his mind refused service.

Much of the distance had to be covered on foot. Yusuf, his lean legs unfaltering, proved a good guide, but a guide with an exaggerated idea of human endurance. He took his small ration without a word of complaint. He had evidently all of the ordinary Moor's disregard for distance and time. When he had replied to Dorliac's questions he had said that the crossing of the Jouf by the detachment would consume two day's more than by the path taken by Modhani—that is, seven days. Little to be wondered at from one of a breed that calls eternity but sixty years.

It was eleven days before they came to landmarks designated on the official maps. Ternay and the sergeants laughed and cried at the same time. The good tidings swept through the detachment. Bir Said, two hundred kilometers west of Osman well, was within thirty-six hour's steady traveling. And, almost a miracle, the animals and men were able to keep going those thirty-six hours, which lengthened into forty before the date-palms were visible.

Falike and his squad, who had guarded the water, had evidently seen a thirsty

detachment arrive at a well. Without waiting for orders they took the lead and stood guard by the well, with bayoneted and loaded rifles. Dorliac stood aside until the last negro had his drink, and then only did he dip his head into a canvas bucket.

The men went about establishing camp jubilantly, singing, pushing each other. The day was occupied with making various repairs. Blankets were shaken out, laid on the ground, rifles taken apart, cleaned and greased, the machine-gun tested.

Ternay shaved, squatting on the ground before a mirror propped against a saddle. He was not pretty to behold even after scraping his face, for, if the flesh had melted from his cheeks, the skin had not shrunk.

"I'm glad it's over," he said. "But, tell me, have I seen the real desert now?"

"We'll ask Gros. Eh, Sergeant, did you like it?"

Gros, hirsute, grimy, ragged, turned around and grinned.

"Pretty bad," he admitted. "But I've seen worse."

"You're a liar," Rombier called out.

"By the way, I had more or less forgotten about Modhani!" Dorliac said. "He seems rather inoffensive, contrasted with what we were up against. Here we are within striking distance again, although he must have gained four or five days. We have this advantage. He believes us either marking time near Zemul or on our way back to Birek. That we would cross the Jouf with negro soldiers would not occur to him."

"I wouldn't want to do it again, either," Ternay agreed.

"It won't be necessary. By the way, allow me to compliment you. For a novice, even for a veteran—"

"Not much choice—either go through or drop."

"And now we have to hook up with the Rekabats. We start during the night—that will be that much gained. I'm rather in a hurry to end the business and go back."

"What does Yusuf think of it?"

"He says that Modhani will hang around south of Taoudeni for awhile."

The two officers shifted their position to a shaded spot under the palm-trees, further protected by the ruin of an old wall, a vestige of a Moroccan fort in the days when Bir Said was a way-station of salt caravans that went to Rio del Oro. Dorliac called Yusuf, and reconstructed the map of the vicinity with the point of his cane on the sand.

"Here is Taoudeni. Here is Osman Well. We are here. Where does Modhani camp?"

"Somewhere here," Yusuf replied and indicated.

"What is it called?"

"No name. It is near the Gleb Doreno —Rock of Doreno."

"There we will go," Dorliac announced, and dismissed Yusuf with a gesture. He translated the brief conversation to Ternay. "Gleb Doreno—a sandstone block of gigantic proportions—I have never seen it, but I know that the Cauvin-Cortier Mission noted it. A landmark, informing the voyager that Taoudeni is near."

"Rather a fine thing to feel that the end is in sight," Ternay remarked. "I can scarcely realize that I have just taken part in a cross-country jaunt that will mark an epoch. I don't believe Major Legastel ever went through what we have just been through." The lieutenant drew a wallet from his inner pocket. "Several times, Dorliac, I was on the point of handing you this to be forwarded to my family in case I dropped."

"Why didn't you?"

"I suppose I instinctively felt we'd pull through and that it would prove ridiculous in retrospect."

He took out several letters, a small packet of photographs. Dorliac repressed a smile. Ternay was about to show his treasures, a final proof of friendship in the commissioned ranks as well as in the rank and file. Dorliac had gazed at a multitude of strange faces and made appropriate comments. On occasion, he

had himself been guilty of such exhibitions.

"This is my mother."

"You resemble her—around the eyes—and the forehead—that's like her, too."

"My father—the two together. Taken just after the Armistice. That explains the victorious pose. My brother—he's an engineer—captain." Ternay hesitated. "This is my fiancée."

A young girl, nineteen or twenty, apparently blond, rather squat and heavy-set, seated on a grassy lawn, sharing the snapshot with a long-legged dog, which she embraced with the left arm, while the right, gracefully curved, rested on the grass.

"She—seems intelligent," Dorliac volunteered.

"This is her brother—before he was in the army. And her mother, taken two or three weeks before I left. Madame Legastel is still beautiful, isn't she?"

"What a woman she must have been! Even ten years ago."

Dorliac held the picture reverently, perhaps because it had been months since he had seen a pretty woman of his own race.

A commotion behind the two officers brought the conversation to an abrupt close. Turning, Dorliac saw Yusuf, struggling with Falike. The Bambara had evidently caught the Moor from behind, but in spite of his bulk and advantage in youth he was getting the worst of the wrestling match.

As Dorliac watched, hesitating to interfere, ignorant of the reason for the quarrel, Yusuf twisted free, met the onrush of the negro with a well placed kick in the stomach. Falike writhed, gasping, on the ground. A private ran forward, clubbed his rifle and brought it down with a sickening impact on the old man's skull.

Dorliac prevented another blow, which, better aimed and stronger in delivery, would have crushed the Moor's head like an egg-shell.

"Easy, you fool. What's wrong?"

"No savvy. I saw the old nigger kick Falike."

Falike had risen to his knees. In a few seconds he was able to stand and answer questions.

"Old man no good, Captain. I watch him all time. He is Moor. I see him get up quick and go toward you, Captain. I know he is Moor—kill Frenchman. I catch him."

Dorliac glanced down at Yusuf. There was no blade within sight that might have been his. In fact, Dorliac recalled that his flint-lock pistol and dagger had been confiscated soon after his capture.

"The devil, he couldn't hope to strangle me, could he? Though, I'll admit he handled Falike easily enough."

Ternay had bent down, and was shaking Yusuf by the shoulder.

"Get up, there, get up, Yusuf!"

"If that ass has killed my guide!" grumbled Dorliac.

A bucket, emptied on Yusuf's head, had little effect. Dorliac ordered him carried under a shelter and stripped of his wet clothing. He dispatched Gros to take out of the medicine-kit a phial of ammonia.

"The old fellow has seen a bit of fighting," Ternay said, pointing to several scars scattered over the torso. "These two from bullets—I've seen enough to know. And what a fine slash that was! Lucky thing it didn't strike on the collar-bone instead of the flesh of the shoulder."

"A mean blow," Dorliac admitted, leaning closer. Then he straightened up, looked at Ternay in astonishment.

"What?" the lieutenant asked.

"That cut— Did you ever see the usual saber slash on an Arab or Moor?"

"No."

"This fellow has been treated by a European surgeon. Stitches—a professional job, done by a man trained in Europe." He ran his finger down the livid seam. "That—and those bullets—not extracted by an Arab."

"But how?"

"Probably served as a *Spahi* in French Service in Algeria at some time."

Falike, unconvinced that he had been mistaken, was still searching the garments for concealed weapons. At last he produced a small object with a flourish, handed it to his chief, grinning.

"Fetish—bad fetish—"

A small leather pocket, such as a Moor might use to hold an amulet. Dorliac squeezed the ends and the side opened. Inside was a page torn from a French magazine, a rather well known weekly devoted to the beauty of women—creased, dated four years before. On one side were black-and-white illustrations in a light, very light, vein. On the other, advertisements.

" 'Facial cream combats wrinkles—' " Dorliac laughed — " 'Madame Ducret, masseuse — receives at her domicile—' Here's a good one, Ternay. Probably the reason this came into Mauretania—'Two young officers, lost in the Mauretanian desert, desire correspondence with two young ladies of artistic taste—J. J. D.' I presume those initials stand for *jeunes, jolies, distinguées*—young, pretty, distinguished! A couple of young fools who wanted to receive letters over which they might laugh a bit and perhaps prepare lively companions for their leave in Paris."

"Yusuf probably picked it up on the emplacement of the camp of one of our detachments and thought it precious," Ternay declared.

"Well, Sergeant, that ammonia? Today or tomorrow?" Dorliac shouted to Gros.

When the sergeant at last ran forward with the required phial, Dorliac knelt, removed the stopper from the little bottle, which he placed under Yusuf's nose. It was some time before the Moor showed signs of life.

"Here he comes!" Dorliac said with relief. "I hope he's not much hurt."

"It is nothing—" Yusuf breathed—in French. His eyes closed again, and he mumbled.

"Did you hear—" Ternay began.

Dorliac stopped the lieutenant's words with a gesture.

"Put up the tent, Gros," he ordered quickly. "This sun doesn't help!"

"IT WAS nearly ten years ago, then, that I left Birek?"

"Ten years, yes, Major."

Andre Legastel plunged long fingers into his gray beard and scratched steadily.

"In a way, it does not seem that long ago—in another, it seems centuries behind. Nothing much happens up here, you know—but so much happened before nothing happened that—"

He became aware of his queer phrasing and apologized.

"Once and for all, Dorliac, I am not as mad as I speak—but the words don't come—I have to repeat them after speaking them, to make sure I have the right ones—but they're coming back—across—across all the time—

"Once I had almost forgotten. I had to make effort to think in French. It was not as if I had abandoned French for a European language with some likeness—Spanish, Italian, even English. I was cut off from it. To practise, I would name things in my head. You see, I had nothing even to read. Then one day, while back in the tents, I got a wrapper off a tin—sardines—and I learned that by heart. It was stolen from me—just why I don't know. Then, I had a whole page of a newspaper and I read that. Until some one got to believe it was magic of some sort and stole that, too. Then I had a page from a magazine—still have it. I found it blowing around, come from where, heaven knows—"

"But, Major," protested Ternay. "It must have been possible for you to escape. You were alone when we found you."

"I didn't want to go back," Legastel said shortly.

"Pardon me, but what were your reasons, Major?"

"My reasons—"

"You must have had reasons for staying," Dorliac put in. "As you say, you could have escaped."

"My honor and the honor of the French Army would not let me go back."

Dorliac looked swiftly toward Ternay. Something had undoubtedly unbalanced Legastel.

"Because you were the only survivor of the detachment, Major?" the captain insisted. "Your reputation is solid enough to have prevented any one from suspecting that you had survived in a manner unworthy of you—"

Major Legastel cracked his knuckles thoughtfully.

Dorliac found it difficult to reconcile the unkempt shepherd with the photographs he had seen of the former pride of the *Meharistes*. And Ternay's astonishment was obvious. Dorliac, with forethought, had dismissed the two non-coms, and only he and Ternay witnessed the nervous spasm that shook Legastel when he had been forced into a confession of his identity.

Dorliac realized that it would not be a wise thing to press him too soon for his story. He advised him to remain in the tent alone, and to call for him when he felt more inclined to resume the conversation. The primary motive of the expedition was lost sight of and there was no further question of proceeding that night.

When the first cool wind swept from the west, when the fires were lighted, Legastel came out and Dorliac invited him to dinner. Falike, Fadama and the other negroes, less restrained in their curiosity than the white men, crowded so near they had to be dismissed with strong words.

Legastel looked up, now, and saw the sergeants.

"Tell me first—do you think you can cover up tonight's doings—I mean keep your sergeants quiet?"

"Both are men."

"Call them!"

Legastel shook the tin cup, filled with coffee gently, to melt the sugar, and drained it. Then he smacked his lips, belched and cleaned his fingers in the sand, thus exhibiting the finest native courtesy, which commands a man to evidence that he has eaten and drunk his fill, that he is replete.

"Call them—" he said again.

Dorliac summoned the non-coms.

"Tell them who I am, Captain."

Dorliac introduced the sergeants, who concealed whatever astonishment they may have felt under the mask of stolid discipline of men who had seen many queer events.

"You are old-timers," the major said. "I have certain reasons to keep my existence secret. It would be an offense for me not to speak directly to you—I'll let you hear my reasons, and then tell me you will not give me away. Agreed?"

"Yes, Major."

"The sentries are posted?" Dorliac asked.

"Yes, Captain," Gros assured him.

"Sit down."

"You have both heard of me before?" Legastel asked.

"I have told Rombier about you many times, Major," Gros said.

"Then, I presume you know I'm dead—that I was killed years ago. And I will tell you why I must stay dead. As for the blacks, they will talk, but only to other blacks. Echoes that would reach white men's ears would be branded as another legend manufactured by some imaginative *griot*—singer—of the detachment.

"You know, probably, how and why I went north toward Hamram. You know that my detachment was wiped out. But none of you know that there were two combats fought near Hamram, one of which I won, the second which I lost.

"My men were new arrivals from the Sudan, strengthened by a few veterans. No better men could have been imagined—for fighters. They died fighting, too. That they were surprized was more or less my fault. They trusted in my judgment and had placed their trust wrongly.

"You know Modhani ben Ismael, now, as your enemy. In the days of which I speak, he was still presumed to be our friend, or rather, open to negotiations. I had secret orders to try to bring him

around to our side by any method I could think of. And I had decided to flatter him, play on his immense pride. I knew the mistake that had been made before. Some petty official had laughed in his face because he was young. I was aware, also, that he had a wholesome fear of my ability. Without false modesty I may say that the Man with the Beard enjoyed a certain prestige.

"Two days before I reached Hamram well a delegation from the Ouled Rekabats in the vicinity came to me. I received them cordially, and there was much salaaming. But none of them would eat with me. They were embarrassed, I could see. That was a bad sign.

"I asked the leader what he had to say. He replied that Modhani had sent him to tell me to retrace my steps, in a word, to leave the country. He warned me that he had two hundred and fifty riflemen gathered within reach, if I did not comply.

"To go back, after coming thus far, would have been an admission of defeat. It would have made me and the French the laughing-stock of the Sahara. I did not underestimate Modhani. I knew that Colonel Flatters, disregarding just such a warning from a Targui chief, had piloted his famous mission into ambush. But, even as he, I could not accept humiliation, which would have been disapproved by my superiors.

"I replied to the emissaries that Modhani had no right to command me; that, even though I had been in the territories of his tribe—which I was not—I represented a nation strong enough, powerful enough for me to feel no fear. But I realized, as I spoke, the cleverness of the young Moor. It was well known my destination was Hamram well. Had he waited until I reached it, I might have spoken defiantly, but I could have turned around, having accomplished my purpose. I could have said that even to displease Modhani, I would go no further. As it was, I had to reach Hamram at all costs, to uphold my prestige.

"He had managed, by this show of authority, to make my men uneasy. The fierce warriors, wrapped from head to foot in blue, with rifles and throwing-spears tied to their saddles, impressed the blacks. One of the Moors tossed a dart into a shield some distance away, as if in play. The steel pierced through. The blacks gasped, for even the Tuareg of the Iforas did not throw a dart so hard and straight.

"I sent the messengers away and resumed the march. That night, instead of halting, I swung north, camped for a rest during the next day, and swung south again, so that the afternoon of the second day found me, with my detachment, a few miles beyond Hamram. As I expected, Modhani had placed himself directly on the path to Hamram. So sure was he that his insolence would make me hurry recklessly in a direct line that he did not even bother with sending scouts to the north.

"As you know, the Moors usually attack just before daybreak. I varied the procedure, and was on his rear at nightfall, when half of his men were looking for me further south. The camels were unpacked, many of the men asleep. The surprize was complete. It was a beautiful bayonet charge, that of ours. You could see the *Tirailleurs* race along, stick a man, trail the gun, recover and lunge again, like lancers at practise. I don't believe a shot was fired on our side during that action.

"Mohani came out of his shelter, right in my path. There was no mistaking him. I don't know what impelled me to shift my saber from right to left, and instead of running him through, collar him and throw him down.

" 'Modhani ben Ismael, dost thou know me?' I asked.

"He looked at me, smiled.

" 'Kill!' he agreed.

"I dragged him to his feet and ordered him to call out to his men to surrender. Those outside were coming back. When they saw me standing by their chief, a revolver against his side, they stopped

short. That was a moment of triumph for which I paid later. Modhani had never harmed me. For him, I felt no hatred, not even dislike. I rather admired him, with that sentimentality our race too often exhibits.

" 'Dost thou ask for peace, Modhani?' I suggested.

" 'I am beaten,' he replied. 'What Allah wills is right.'

"I accepted that as a plea for peace. It did not appear possible that they would care to fight again for some time. My men must have left thirty-five or forty on the ground. On my side, thanks to the surprize, few casualties. I told Modhani, before his men, that he should wait until his beard grew longer before matching his wits against men. I pointed out that he, who spoke so boldly, had not even kept in touch with my scouts. I felt that some of the older warriors had tried to make him do this, and he had refused. In that way, I was lessening his influence. An unsuccessful leader lasts no longer in Mauretania than elsewhere.

" 'I am beaten,' he repeated.

"It was a situation such as one seldom encounters in this sort of fighting. Usually, the beaten force leaves the field, abandoning property and corpses. Modhani's men had stayed to be with him, and were armed. For the first time, I knew hesitation. I had proved Modhani a rash, raw chieftain. Just how far I could push my success, surrounded by armed men outnumbering my *Tirailleurs* several times, I was not sure. I had left a sergeant with the baggage-convoy, and a sudden fear came over me that he would be attacked. An unexplainable hesitation, unexplainable even now, gripped me. Suppose I tried to take Modhani away as hostage! Would that not be the signal for the struggle to start anew? Even Modhani's death might not halt the Moors a second time.

" 'When wilt thou come to my tent at Hamram well, where we may talk of terms, Modhani ben Ismael?' I asked him.

"Soon after sunrise, he said.

"At the worst he might decide to go without discussing terms of submission. That would still leave me the victor. As for attacking me at the well, I did not believe it possible; I had enough men for defense, even against his many warriors, enough salt and camels for food, and the immense advantage of water. In a few days his own supply would give out and he would be forced to go away.

"I received his salute, gathered my men and left, ready to hasten my pace if they stirred to attack. But all went well. I found Hamram well occupied by my sergeant and the men guarding the baggage animals. That night I kept awake, and had half my force in arms. I intended to guard against surprize and stick in one place until the need of water drove the Rekabats to the north.

"The following morning, shortly after sunrise, Modhani appeared as promised, accompanied by six of his men. They were admitted into our camp, and I sat with them. I told them of our intentions toward their tribe, our aim in Mauretania, warned them that sooner of later we would push into their own territory in the Sahara, told them that we wanted them to promise not to loot our friends, and pay a certain tax for pasturing rights.

"They asked me what the French offered in return for the taxes, what substitute for raiding as an occupation we could find them. I was stumped. I spoke words, high sounding and meaningless, felt almost ridiculous counseling the fellows to devote their attention to agriculture and the improvement of the camel.

"Modhani then told me that he was not the chief of the Rekabats, but merely the nephew of an illustrious uncle. He was not qualified, he said, to accept. But he would bear my words to his people, who would send a delegation down to Birek to go through the necessary ceremonial of submission. For me, he professed the greatest esteem. And he left.

"As I said, I had not slept during the night. And I did not think there was immediate danger. So that I lay down. I forgot for an instant the rule that a chief

in the desert must always be ready. I awoke with the crash of the tent on my body, pinning me to my blankets. I first believed it an accident, then when the firing and shouts rose, I knew it was an attack. I struggled to get free. But men must have thrown themselves on top of the tent. The shots scattered, died out, a savage clamor, then everything was quiet.

"Some time after that, the tent was lifted and the sunlight struck my eyes. When I could see again, Modhani was bending over me. He had smiled in defeat but he did not smile in victory. He is a handsome beggar, in his own way, with a long eagle-beak of a nose, thin lips and eyes that blaze like live coals. In those days he was young, and pretty as a woman. But his eyes—they always remind me of that legendary character of the Arabs, Ben el Lefa, the Son of the Snake.

" 'Greetings, Man with the Beard,' he said. 'I, too, have learned! When I came here to speak with thee of foolish things, thy men thought that peace had indeed come—that while I was within thy tent, with soldiers watching me and mine, my warriors would not attack. But, fool, as soon as I left, they who had crawled near while I kept thee busy, they slew the sentries and entered.'

"He laid his knife on my throat. I glanced steadily into his eyes—and I don't know why, the old tale told around the fires came back to me, 'Ask a Moor to spare thee in the name of Allah, and he will do so.'

"A friend I had among the pacified people had taught me, as a joke, the exact words. As a joke—for no true warrior, whether Moor or Frank, ever asked for mercy in Mauretania. I was not afraid—not afraid—I never was a coward—"

DORLIAC laid his hand on that of Legastel, to steady him.

"We know, Major—"

"I stared into his eyes, and, almost without my willing it—I am sure I did not will it—my lips formed the words—

" '*Allah, tiney affia, man asmu el Moulana.*'

"My Adrari was evidently good, for Modhani stepped back, sheathed his knife. Then he spat into my face.

" 'Dog—thou hast cheated me!'

"The men holding me stepped aside, and I stood up, dazed. I wiped my cheeks in silence. And I understood his disgust. My pleading had taken from his victory; he had defeated only a dog.

" 'The other white men were indeed men, and the blacks, also—but one dog, son of a dog, among them, and he the leader!' Modhani turned toward his followers. 'Let no man who has seen, who has heard, speak. Men from one end of the desert to the other would laugh at me for beating dogs.'

"He turned to me.

"Since before my father was born our people have heard of the Franks. But not of those like thee. I have granted thee life. But that is all.'

"They took their dead aside, buried them. Then they prepared to go. I was among them, but they did not seem to see me. When the time for departure came Modhani addressed me.

" 'Walk among the camels.'

"And so I walked among the camels of the baggage train. At the end of the first day's march one of the drivers gave me a little water, a handful of dates. I had lost my helmet and was hoping that sunstroke would drop me like a stunned ox. I was uncomfortable, my head ached, but I did not drop. At first, sharing the scorn of their leader, the men who had strippped all the bodies for loot, left my belongings alone.

" They gave way to temptation on the second day, and took my clothing from me, boots and all. My sole undergarment, a flannel abdominal belt, went with the rest, and I strode along stark naked, waiting for the sun to strike me down. And I reached the end of the day's journey, burned raw. The evening of the third day, I was still walking, although it must have seemed as if I had been flayed alive. I must have been a pretty sight to

stir an urge of pity in a Moor's heart—one of the warriors threw me a ragged cloak.

"The sun of the desert, death to a European without a helmet, appeared to have no effect on me. I had asked for my life. Modhani's mercy seemed to have included that of the entire land. I could suffer, but I could not die.

"On the fifth day Modhani sent for me. He said that he was tired of seeing me. He had promised not to kill me, that was true. I had asked in the name of Allah; Allah should decide. He had a pit dug for me, into which I was slid up to my chin. Then the hole was filled in, tamped solidly, until just my head emerged. I laughed, for I knew what he did not know. I could not die. The doors of death had been opened before me and I had refused to enter. Now I would live endlessly, seeking the gate that led from life.

"As a final farewell, Modhani poured water on my skull.

" 'So that it can not be said that I took thy life after being begged for it in the name of Allah, I cool thee,' he explained. 'Now, if thou dost die it is Allah's will.'

"The long caravan of warriors filed away toward the north. Modhani had turned my face in that direction so that I could see the silhouettes growing smaller and smaller, far, far off.

"They vanished. I was left alone, my eyes level with the plain, my body stifling in the sand. You, Dorliac and Ternay, you who spoke of the loneliness of the Jouf, do you know what solitude can be? The sun beat down and the water on my head dried swiftly. There is no use trying to describe what I endured. And I could not die.

"I howled, because I was alone. Howled like the dog I was named. I cried for help, in French, in Arabic, knowing that I would not be heard. But it was sound, it was life in the solitude. Then I was no longer alone, and the horror grew. A black shadow raced along the ground, swift, darting, and raced back again, brushing over my face, making me grateful for even that second of shade on my skin.

"This happened several times, and I thought that merciful delirium had come. Then I felt a sharp pang through my pains. Another—and I realized what company Allah had sent me in answer to my prayers.

"Vultures! Swooping over my head! They had left me alone until such time as I stopped screaming. My head must have appeared to them to be a lump of meat laid on the ground, which emitted sounds worthy of a camel. Did you ever try to shout with your chest compressed? Quite a strain. I noted that when I shouted I was left alone for several minutes. Only the shadows, crossing and recrossing on the sand.

"Then one of the birds, a large, disgusting, half-plucked veteran, landed before me, probably to find out what sort of an animal I was presumed to be by the creator. In his intelligent eye, cocked toward me, I could see speculation, puzzlement.

"He wobbled nearer and I had the very definite certainty that he was about to make a dash for my eyes. Hopeless as I was, the idea of being blinded by that filthy scavenger sickened me. I screamed straight at him and drove him into longer swoops high above. I received an occasional peck, a good part of my ears went—if I lifted this mop of hair I could present two charming lumps.

"Night fell at last or I lost consciousness—I will never quite know. Very likely it was night, or my face would have been eaten away. I remember feeling cold—very cold.

"THE NEXT I remember—a campfire, much like this, and a young Moor seated beside it, playing on the flute. I wore some such garment as this. I spoke to him, although I did not know him, and it seemed quite natural that we should converse in dialect. It developed that for ever so many moons I had been with him, his helper. Tending sheep. He informed me that I was mad—that I had

probably been made so by being buried alive. Undoubtedly I was a man guilty of some monstrous crime to deserve punishment such as is seldom inflicted upon men. The men of the Ouled Hankia who had dug me up had thought so. But Allah's will was clear—they had been sent on that path to save me. It appeared that I was quite a character, amiable and willing to serve, although, even for a madman, devoid of much sense. The boy had consented to take me because Allah protects madmen, and some of that protection would inevitably fall upon him as well.

"That I now spoke sensibly was astonishing. So astonishing that when the men from the tribe came next with provisions, they took me back to the tents to speak with the Kaid. The venerable old man asked me who I was. I replied that I was an Algerian who had met bad luck at the hands of raiders after an attack on the caravan in which I served as guard.

"He praised Allah for curing me and offered me a situation in the tribe, as I was a strong man and looked as if I had once carried arms. I refused, saying that I was satisfied to go back with my companion. While seated around the fires, the few nights I spent on that occasion, I deftly asked for news. My memory came back whole. I knew who I was and what I had done.

"I learned that the French were not sending out expeditions in the region. It seemed that they were having battles of their own in their own country, against the Red-beards. Big battles. I knew then that the long expected war with Germany had broken out and that I would not fight in it. More than anything, that cut deeply. You know we felt the war coming long before, nearer and nearer. The Kaid said that one of the battles had been fought on water—a big one."

"Jutland!" Dorliac exclaimed. "Major, you say that you recall nothing between your visit to the Kaid and the few days following the fighting at Hamram well?"

"Nothing."

"Three years, Major. Three years!"

"Nothing surprizing in that," Gros made bold to offer. "Almost a week with head bare in the sun, a day with his head level with the soil on which you could have fried an egg—the major would have had a sacred good constitution if he hadn't felt it!"

"Enough to kill ten men," Rombier approved.

"To me," Legastel resumed, "those three years were as one night. At the time I was in a way hoping to get back to the French. It wasn't until later that I decided against it. I was taken back to my sheep. Many months I spent with the youth, speaking little, he playing the flute, I thinking. We each had an old camel, not good enough for any one save a herder. It was a lazy life, even when we happened to run dry. Then followed the scurry for a waterhole, the sheep dying. Hamram well is almost always good, so we went there often.

"Once we were caught there by an armed party of twenty-five or thirty men. I recognized them for Rekabats and tried to leave. The youth held me back, saying they were on good terms with us, and at most would take a lamb or two for food. And they had news, probably, of what was occurring down south, near the French outposts.

"I thought myself too changed to be recognized. The Rekabats are many, but I had spied the tall silhouette of Modhani, heard his voice. I drove my sheep past their shelters of black leather, toward the well. The lad went to converse with them. He came back saying that I was to come and sit with the rest, for among them were several who knew my country. He meant Algeria.

"It was not long before, from across the fires, I felt Modhani's eyes upon my face. I knew that he had looked into my eyes on two occasions with too much intensity to ever forget. I avoided his glance. Under some pretext I rose to leave very soon, and it was with a shiver of dread that I saw him rise to follow me.

" 'Dog!' he addressed me. 'Twice already have I seen thee at this well—and always thou hast glanced in my eyes. Hear now! Go back thou to thy people and all will be shamed for having had thee as a friend, as a man, as a father—even though, by now, thy wives and children belong to others. Recall that I need feel no shame for having once beaten a coward. Since then I have beaten and and slain brave men, warriors of thy race.'

"He was capable of doing what he said. Officially, my tale would be accepted; many would even believe me, though I lied. But the natives would know that it was true.

" 'It is well,' I agreed. 'I stay.'

" 'That is right. Is that lad thy friend?'

" 'Yes. We have been together long, Modhani ben Ismael.'

"He went back to the fires, called the boy. I had followed, vaguely uneasy. I expected him to order the lad to separate from me. The others must have understood better what was to come, for they grinned. Modhani laid his left hand on the boy's shoulder, bent and looked into his eyes. Suddenly, his right hand moved from his belt, and the lad was down, stabbed in the kidneys. Several men, laughing, caught me as I leaped toward the murderer.

"Modhani left. Later, he warned the Hankia that any one who befriended me would have the same fate. They fear him, as they are a peaceful tribe, and a boy counts for little. Since then, I have been living alone.

"I have met Modhani once. He took the precaution to have me disarmed before approaching within range of the flintlock pistol I carried. So that I have never had the opportunity to lodge a slug in his head. He would have preferred to kill me, knowing how much I hate him, but he is religious and believes firmly that Allah wishes me to live.

"The day before you came to Hamram he sent out men to give news to the shepherds, and also ordered that I should be watched, kept from communicating with you. The shepherds took away my camel and it seemed out of the question for me to walk to Hamram without being seen. They had not foreseen the patrol.

"From camelmen I have encountered at various wells in the last few years, I have learned much about the Jouf. I knew that I could take you across. But unless I revealed my identity, which I did not wish to do, you might have distrusted me. And so, when you found me, I let it seem as if the proposition were made by you.

"In a few weeks everything will be over one way or another, and I'll go back to my sheep. You understand that, even without the threat of exposure, which would disappear at Modhani's death, I can not go back—ever."

DORLIAC consulted the others with a brief understanding glance.

"We are four Frenchmen here, Major, fairly representative of our race and of our army. In a question such as this, which is one of honor, not of discipline, both Sergeant Gros and Sergeant Rombier are qualified to speak. We are up here, far from the usual routine, desert soldiers faced by a desert problem. If the others differ from me, they will speak. Is that not so?"

"Yes, Captain," each agreed in turn.

"Major, you have stated your reasons for not coming home. We will now state ours to the contrary. What you did ten years ago was perhaps a mistake, a weakness—"

Legastel again resumed his annoying gesture, scratching his chin through the beard.

"A weakness," he remarked, "that has no excuse on the part of a detachment commander. A captain goes down with his ship, a desert leader with his detachment. The case might be dismissed by a court martial, I know, for it has no precedent and becomes possible only in this peculiar kind of warfare. An officer who lowers in any way the respect of his foes for his uniform—"

"May I say something?" Gros asked.

Legastel nodded.

"This: That the detachment was already wiped out when you surrendered. Your death could in no way have saved so much as one man. The opinion of a barbaric chief is of little importance. We use our superiority in armament when we can; we should use our knowledge of their traditions to save ourselves. You did right, Major."

Legastel showed the stumps of teeth between the mustache and beard in a brief, scowling grimace. His bony wrist leveled toward the sergeant.

"Gros, suppose that tomorrow the same situation confronted you, that the knife was on your throat. Can you swear, on your soldier's conscience, that you would beg for your life?"

Dorliac stared at Gros. The noncom's face, tanned and made ruddier by the fire-light, paled perceptibly. He moistened his lips twice before speaking.

"As I sit here now, I can not swear. Probably it would be another story were the knife on my throat as you suppose. Guess it's one of those things that must be experienced to be judged."

"You're a farm boy, aren't you, Gros?" Legastel asked with a smile.

"I am, Major."

"I thought so. Truth springs from the soil. Now, I wouldn't question the captain, the lieutenant, or even Rombiers, who is a city man, I'll bet. The officers and the city dweller would answer me with mental reservations. You did not, and I thank you."

Legastal spoke with greater ease than before. With the more fluent use of French, his old metallic personality, legendary at Birek, was breaking through the shell of native solemnity crusted upon his soul for years.

"A court martial might acquit me, but the crime would remain, By showing cowardice I weakened my people in the eyes of the Ouled Rekabats. Who knows whether my plea, even more than Modhani's victory, did not prompt him to attack you on a larger scale? Who knows but that poor little chap I heard you talk about, who was butchered near Birek, shortly before your departure, would not be alive today?

"At first glance my fault seemed small. That's what I thought when the longing to go home was strong. But the desert brings wisdom. I ruminated for long hours, long days and long years. And I know. Modhani was right. Not even the lowest negro private begged for life. I did. I had shown courage before, that is true, but that only increased my fault. If I, reputed the bravest, begged, what would weaker men do?"

Dorliac himself was shaken. Ternay, unconvinced, twisted a dead cigaret stub between his fingers, avoiding his eyes. Gros, his momentary pallor shifted again to brick-red, mopped his forehead. Rombier coughed uneasily.

"Anyway," the captain declared smoothly, "we have many days in which to come to a decision. What appears the right course now may not be the right course two weeks from now. Boys, you can return to your duties."

When the three officers were alone, Legastel shrugged.

"Why try to change a decision made years ago, Dorliac?"

"I want Ternay to speak to you privately, on matters which are neither my concern nor that of the sergeants. He is a friend of Madame Legastel and the fiancée of your daughter. He knew your son. There are others to be considered. I have of necessity been in the way, but I'll go and make the rounds now."

Legastel grasped the captain by the sleeve.

"Sit down, you fool. No exaggerated delicacy. Ternay, I knew your father, your mother, and even without knowing exactly into what sort of a person my daughter has grown, I believe you will do as well as any one for her husband. You have my paternal blessing." Legastel laughed. "Although, after meeting the black sheep, you may break it off."

"I believe, Major, that it would be best for you to come home," Ternay said in an unsteady voice.

"To tell you the truth," Legastel retorted, "I have almost forgotten home. And my recently acquired habits would not make me a prize husband."

Dorliac intervened vigorously.

"Major, the mention of your wife's name precipitated all this. It was when you heard it, I recall, that you rose and came forward in such a way that the negroes believed you were about to attack us. Is that indifference?"

Legastel spat into the ashes.

"I guess not. I was home so little that my union was unspoiled by too long association. It has kept its bloom. In fact, I confess it, I am still in love with my wife. That has little to do with this, however. In just what manner the accepted notion that I love my wife can alter what has happened, I fail to perceive." He added with pathetic cynicism, "I was curious to learn just how she looked—in contrast with me."

"Madame Legastel has lost her son," Dorliac went on. "Is it right that she—"

"I knew," Legastel said stolidly, "that the boy was gone. Ternay's manner was proof enough. But the love I bore my wife was not sufficiently strong to make me forget the army and stay at her side. How can I use it now to compromise with a question of military honor? I will not have the additional cowardice of hiding behind skirts."

"It is of the utmost importance that news from you should reach France together with my first letter," Ternay maintained.

Legastel stared at him, then nodded.

"I believe I understand, Ternay. You are hinting that bigamy should be prevented. Yet I see in your warning all the more reason for disappearing, and for good. Bah!" He did not flinch at the words, "A woman can not wait all her life. I should feel flattered by ten years of regrets."

"A marriage of reason, that is all, urged upon her by all her friends." Ternay leaned forward. "I am certain that if you came back—"

"I could not be decently kicked out," Legastel concluded for him. "No. She still loves me—but she loves the man I was. Look at me, Ternay. I'm fifty-one or two—yet you both credited me with seventy. My venerable beard— Do you recall the words? No, I'd sooner have her with another man, remembering me as I was, than have her see me—as I am. I was rather handsome, was I not? And conceit is the last to die, I guess."

"What Ternay has said is to be thought about," Dorliac declared. "He will be compelled to reveal what he knows, rather than permit—"

Legastel filled a pipe methodically, dismissing the proffered cigarets.

"Let her marry. Since when has a sin by ignorance been a real sin? Unless it annoys young Ternay. He may fear to bring sons into the world whose grandmother was—what shall I say?—illegally bound to her second husband. In reality, marriage has no importance, save in regard to the rest of the world. If the world believes a union regular, who's harmed? Rombier and Gros have given me their word of honor to be silent. When you called them over to listen, you asked for that word of honor. The Kaid of my tribe has four wives and is a most respected gentleman. In Thibet, the reverse would be perfectly acceptable. Don't bother further, please."

He rose and strode away. Dorliac followed and reached him near the wall of baggage surrounding the camp.

"Where's Ternay?" Legastel asked.

"Stayed near the fire. He's miserable."

"He doesn't know what misery is." Legastel laid his nervous hand on Dorliac's shoulder. "You don't think it amuses me, do you, the thought of my wife marrying another man? God, no!"

"You can prevent it. Modhani, even if we do not settle with him this time, can do you no harm. Do you have the illusion that among the several hundred warriors who were with him at Hamram there was not one who gossiped? Probably the tale spread everywhere among the Moors, and was believed to be a lie. It is ten years old, dead.

"Our agents are in constant touch with the natives and we never heard so much as a whisper concerning you. During the war, how many men knew weakness greater than yours, and were forgiven, given another chance? You have accepted the natives' opinion as your own, in regard to your deed, as in regard to marriage. Yet your white man's jealousy twists you—and your white man's common sense should lead you back."

"Words," Legastel said.

"How can one express anything, save in words? If I could use thoughts as they form in my head, in my heart, I would soon convince you."

LEGASTEL sat down on a case of ammunition, then moved away to squat on the ground with his legs folded beneath him.

"I'm not comfortable seated like a European," he declared. "Listen to me, Dorliac. I wish that you would forget what has occurred today; consider me as Yusuf. The sergeants and Ternay will follow your lead. And don't call me Major; it annoys me."

Dorliac felt that under the light tone, the impassive face, Legastel was writhing. He was filled with immense pity for the man. His old hero-worship of the celebrated officer returned. What were a few words hastily spoken, compared with years of solid service and ten years of hell?

There were moments when he almost shared the old man's opinions, believed that he should atone to the end. Reason, humanity, repelled these thoughts. If Legastel remained in the desert, he would have his battle to fight over again, made more difficult by the knowledge that his wife would marry another.

"I repeat what I said before, Major," Dorliac said. Then he paused briefly. "The future will indicate our course. In the meantime, I surrender command of the detachment to you."

"What do you mean?"

"Unless precisely instructed to the contrary by his orders, a captain must give place to a major. That is regulation."

"I am no longer an officer."

"Have you resigned? Have you been degraded? Those are the only reasons for an officer below the pension limit to lose his commission."

"I'm dead."

"Do not dodge responsibility."

"Tempting," Legastel admitted. "To feel a man once more, a chief. However, I decline."

"You place me in an embarrassing position, Major."

"You're a good lad, Dorliac," Legastel said, after awhile. "But what good is an old, half-mad man such as myself? What I know I shall tell you. But the decisions must rest with one who has not been baked as much as I. Your trick is clear; bring me out into the open and force me to agree with your plan of return."

They were silent. Gros passed them on his rounds. The calls of the sentries echoed. The Moorish auxiliaries, grouped around their fires, were listening in rapt attention to the flute played by one of their comrades. The monotonous drone seemed to unwind like a ribbon of sound up into the stars.

"The flute—" Legastel mused. "You hear it, Dorliac, and you don't understand. Many a night, after Modhani ordered men to shun me, I crawled near the fires, to listen. I'd long for it. God is my witness, I am telling you the truth. I have suffered here, but it would kill me to leave without thought of return. You have served down near the Senegal River, Dorliac?"

"Yes, Major."

"Then you know how a Senegalese will lose his will when he hears the *djeli*—native singer—play on his three-cord guitar. Nothing matters, nothing has value—neither money nor honor. For the smile of a woman or the playing of the *djeli* he will give silver, oxen, home. That flute has a like effect on me. Sometimes the old Legastel awakes, stirs in me. But it is a reflection, a ghost. I feel myself now, sinking back—back."

"Habit, that's all."

"You will understand me better than Ternay or the others. You are a man for this land. And I say, given my choice between leaving forever or staying here forever, I'd stay, even without that which holds me. A queer life, the life of a wolf—I like it. They still have houses in France?"

"Of course."

"I don't want to see them, ever again. Nights when I went to sleep on the sand, with my mind swinging in immense leaps between the stars, I laughed softly at myself. Alone, save for my old camel and the sheep. Do I want to wear English-cut garments, carry a stick, and a flower in my buttonhole, go to the sea-shore in the summer, hunting in the fall, elbowed by people? Striding on roads, or in fields so tiny that my eyes will hit a farmhouse wall at every step? A wife, a daughter, social obligations. White gloves, marriages, church, theatres. I feel all spent inside at the thought.

"I would not live long enough to become reaccustomed to it all. And, some fine morning, I'd die ceremoniously on a featherbed. No! Before, I longed to hear French; now, I know where my life is best spent. I feel less at home with you and Ternay than I would with a bunch of passing camelmen. Where does the best goat-cheese come, Dorliac? The best dates? The best camels? Who is the leader of the Draouyi? You don't know. Those things interest me. You understand me?"

"Not altogether, Major."

"You have been in the desert, on and off, for how many years?"

"Nine years altogether."

"You are sent out. Your company is often solely negroes. You do not eat well, you have bad water to drink—the residue at the bottom of the skin is odorous. You labor as hard as it is possible for a man.

"You are weighed down with responsibility. And there is a strong chance that you will end on the sand, from thirst or from some blow received from nowhere. You are intelligent; you have training of a sort for command. Perhaps you have an independent income. Why do you live the life of a galley-slave, Dorliac?"

"My calling—"

"Hope of promotion? A decoration? Tell that to others. What do you care how many strings there are on your sleeves, how many ribbons hang on your chest. You have a camel and space before you. Would you consent to abandon the desert?"

"No."

"Neither would I."

Legastel refused to wear a French uniform, but he had consented to clothe himself in better garments, purchased from one of the auxilaries.

During the ten days that followed he shared the board of the officers. His first primitive ways were fast vanishing. He came nearer to European manners at meals. He had but rare lapses into his brooding silences. But as the detachment neared the rocks of Doreno Legastel's problem sank into the background.

Dorliac was aware that the morale of his followers was splendid. The blacks sensed that they had accomplished a worthy feat, and even the auxiliaries admired the captain for having crossed the Jouf, where nine out of ten white leaders would have turned back.

Modhani had seemed unwilling to halt and settle matters although he must have known the French were in the vicinity. Shortly after leaving Bir Said, a Moorish patrol had been sighted and a few shots exchanged without result. Dorliac had followed a northerly course, back and forth from west to east, and east to west, across the Taoudeni-Araouan caravan route.

Each day the landscape changed, from the rocky plain to the tumultuous dune country. There were long miles over which the camels labored, miles strewn with smooth, round pebbles glistening in the sun as far as the eye could sweep. Then, spacious corridors between tall brownish dunes from which the breeze blew fine sand in a cloud that veiled the sun.

Double sentries were posted at night. An officer and a non-com would be awake at all times. There had been alarms, shots fired into the dark, once a body discovered in the morning, two hundred yards from the lines. An encampment from which bullets stream toward the least sound was not an encouraging goal for the Rekabats.

The detachment had been east of the Jouf ten days, when, far to the east, could be seen the triple rocks of Doreno, a tall cathedral-like mass, flanked by a conical sandstone half its height and another shaft of red rock. Legastel had told Dorliac that, although there was no source of water near the rocks, date-palms and coarse grass grew between the cone and the smaller rock.

Soon Modhani must take his choice between returning home without more loot—a few worn camels, even bearing French brands, would not be considered a successful prize—or fighting. Remembering the young man's pride, Dorliac felt that Modhani would take the latter course.

There existed a difference between the two leaders, aside from race and training. The Frenchman's future did not depend wholly on the coming action. If he were beaten off, he would at the worst be transferred to another colony.

On the other hand, Modhani was a prey to criticism from his own tribe. Back in the tents were many warriors older in experience than Modhani, who were ready to take advantage of any misfortune that befell him to bring themselves to the fore. The young chief was placed in a difficult position. He must save prestige and at the same time save lives. He could not run too far, could not abandon the happy hunting ground of raiders near Taoudeni.

IN THE north several silhouettes appeared, coming straight for the French, men mounted on camels, each tipped by the glistening steel of a spear.

"Machine-gun to the northern face!" Dorliac ordered. "Combat stations, stand by your arms! Corporal Falike to the baggage train!"

The men took positions without confusion, in silence, as they had so often done in training. Scattered among the pack-camels, the auxiliaries stood ready to control their beasts in an emergency, watched by Falike's squad of negroes. Ternay, in charge of the eastern face of the square, stood very straight, his face set, elated at the prospect of his first real action in Africa. Legastel was near Dorliac.

"Sights at two hundred and fifty meters," Dorliac resumed. "Do not fire until command is given. Gros, have you inspected the machine-gun?"

"Yes, Captain."

"You retain charge of it throughout, understand?"

Sergeant Gros tapped Fadama on the shoulder and took the Bambara's place on the saddle. His big, sunburned hands touched the breech here and there with a caressing touch. His back was turned to Dorliac, but even in the set of his shoulders it was easy to see his elation.

Dorliac lowered the field-glasses.

"I don't see the sense of a half-dozen men rushing at us. They know we won't be fooled into carelessness on other sides."

"They have some logical purpose; be sure of that," Legastel assured him. "They are not fools."

"They're stopping now," Dorliac commented.

Five hundred yards away, the Rekabats had halted. Then, with an unanimous gesture, they threw their spears into the sand, fifty or sixty feet to one side. All but one dismounted.

"They've come to parley," Legastel announced. "Are you going to accept the offer?"

"What would you advise?"

"It won't do any harm to talk to them. But I'll get out of sight. I don't think they had better see me here."

"I'll talk to them near the northeast angle. You can lose yourself among the auxiliaries. Turn your back and they

can not spot you among men clad as yourself."

"Five of them coming on foot, Captain," Gros called out.

"Fadama, take five men to meet them. Search them for weapons."

Dorliac did not wish to be murdered by men who would make the sacrifice of their lives to do away with their enemy's chief. The Bambara approached the emissaries, and while his men covered them with their bayoneted rifles, inspected them from heels to turbans.

"No catch guns; no catch knives, Captain," Fadama reported.

"Bring them in."

The five Rekabats passed through the line, casting curious glances toward the machine-gun. They were tall, stately fellows, not one of them under six feet in height. They might have been five brothers—identical rounded foreheads, identical long noses ending in wide nostrils, upper lip clean-shaven, tufts of black beard covering cheeks and chin.

"Salaam, Sidi Captain!"

"Greetings to you, Rekabats."

"We come with a message from Modhani ben Ismael," said one, who acted throughout as spokesman. The others gazed about and did not seem concerned in the conversation.

"Five men to bring one message?" Dorliac asked with some irony.

"Indeed, in this land, men must travel in numbers to be safe. Dost not thou know there are *kabulani*—brigands—in this region?"

"I have so heard," Dorliac agreed dryly. "Is the message by word of mouth or is it written?"

"It is written."

The speaker gave Dorliac a parchment. The captain unrolled it and read. It was written in splendid Korani, proving once and for all that Modhani, although not a Holy Man in the proper sense of the word, was a Talib, and therefore more cultured than the average Rekabat.

To the Yuzbashi, in authority over the soldiers of the Franks:

Whereas you have crossed the Jouf to follow us, we know your worth. I do not fear battle, for I have now with me many more men than before. It is my sincere wish, the wish of my head and the wish of my heart that there be no further bloodshed. I ask to come with a delegation to your tents. We will talk of our affair and arrange for another delegation to proceed in the near future to Birek, there to make a peace that will last sixty years and more. If Allah wills.

—Modhani ben Ismael.

AS DORLIAC glanced up from the message, he saw the speaker still smiling, not with his lips, but with his eyes, in a friendly fashion. He evidently knew the contents of the message he bore. The others had strolled farther into the camp, with such assurance that Fadama and his men had not halted them but were content to walk at their side, ready to interfere should they attempt a hostile act.

"Do not stray!" Dorliac invited them, sharply. They returned, and grouped placidly about their leader. "Thou! Is thy chief ready to give back the camels and replace those which have died? And who will pay for the bloodshed?"

"I know nothing. Modhani ben Ismael will speak, not I."

"Tell him that I will speak with him if he comes. But, also warn him that he must accompany me, he and five others, back to Birek, as hostages. If Modhani sent you but to see how strong we are, tell him that we are strong enough to beat him. Thou dost see?" Dorliac indicated the *Tirailleurs*, the machine-gun. "With these, I fear nothing of the Rekabats."

"There is nothing to fear when we come to talk of peace," the messenger assured him. "Men who crossed the Jouf without a guide can not fear anything."

The man expressed himself in good Arabic; he had an ease of manner which made Dorliac suspicious. He sent for the shepherd lad. He had kept him prisoner to prevent his return to the Hankias.

"This youth guided us. Dost thou recognize this man as Modhani, lad?"

"No, master."

The Moor showed his teeth in amusement.

"Thou hast never seen Modhani ben Ismael to believe I am a man such as he. There is the male palm-tree, and the female. There is the warrior, and the man who commands many warriors."

"I shall then see him soon?"

"Thou dost promise to safeguard him while in thy camp? He will come to speak first, then, perhaps, will consent to go with you, to answer for the blood that was shed."

"I promise. If he comes with peace in his heart he will be safe within my camp."

"He will bring his counselors with him."

"No! He will come alone."

"Alone?"

"Yes. If he comes accompanied, I will not allow him near. I will fire."

The ambassador seemed doubtful.

"I can but repeat thy words."

"Say to him but one more thing. Unless he consents to bring the camels back, and beasts to replace those that have died, also consents to come with me, he and five more, I shall go on pursuing the Rekabats. There are more Franks behind me who will come soon. Those who have eyes know well that sooner or later, this year or next, the land of the Rekabats will have to know us as other tribes have learned to know us. Men of peace to the peaceful; warriors to the warriors. It is written. No one but a fool fails to see ahead."

"All these things I will relate to him."

"If he comes not tomorrow soon after the sun rises, I shall know he has decided for combat. I consent to deal with you, not through fear, but to show that we do not deem all Rekabats our enemies. Go now."

The five departed. They strolled leisurely, heads erect, without turning. Arriving near their camels, they plucked their spears from the ground, mounted and rode away.

MODHANI BEN ISMAEL came soon after sunrise.

He was alone, mounted on a magnificent camel, a big whitish brute, a perfect *mehari*, eight or nine years old. He was permitted to enter the French lines to dismount. As Dorliac stepped forward to greet him, he lowered his face veil with a gesture almost feminine in grace. He appeared considerably older than the captain had expected, but he was indeed a handsome man. Under the folds of the turban his forehead curved like a sweep of bronze.

Straight brows sheltered a blazing, black glance. His bearded cheeks were framed in snowy white wool, against which a soft scarf of green silk made a startling contrast. Not much taller than the French leader, he was certainly shorter than the smallest of the five giants who had heralded his coming on the preceding afternoon. Nevertheless, he was evidently a chief. He gave a rare impression of virility and strength, despite his graceful bearing.

"Peace be with thee, Captain Dorliac," he said.

His smile proved a disappointment, for the teeth were neither very white nor perfect in shape. And his smile was not sincere.

"Peace to him who comes in peace," Dorliac answered shortly.

Modhani immediately asked for cigaret paper and tobacco, which were given him. He rolled a smoke with deft, long fingers. He produced a box of matches from the front pocket of his *gandoura*. The gesture was studied, deliberate. Dorliac bit his lips. The match safe had belonged to the young lieutenant killed near Birek.

The Moor was very much at ease, blew smoke through his nostrils, glanced about, seemed in no hurry to speak. Ostentatiously he removed the sheath knife from his forearm and tossed it near his camel, where he had also left spear and carbine.

"Not many of thy men were left behind in the Jouf," he commented.

"Many of thine?"

"No. But we are not the same men. Many thanks is due to that youth who led thee so well."

"Have no fear, he shall be rewarded."

"Do not leave him in the desert, then.

His people would punish him by death." Modhani moved his head in a grave gesture to express the belief that, even with the best intentions in the world, he could not prevent the execution of a traitor. "That young chief, the lieutenant, he is new to the country?"

Dorliac glanced at Ternay, who had not stirred from his post.

"Yes. But he has fought before, in fights such as thou hast never seen." The captain broke off abruptly, unwilling to allow the conversation to drift. "Thou hast come to seek peace. Thy men have told thee what I wish?"

"Five men and myself," Modhani agreed. "But which five?"

"Important men."

"What will be their fate?"

"That will be told by my chiefs. I have not asked thee for peace."

"Why five men and not four, or six? I come in good faith and I will send a delegation to Birek soon."

"It must be now."

"I have to go back and select the men, Captain."

"We, too, are in good faith."

"That is well. I shall return."

"Come into my tent—not only to rest from the heat of the sun, but to write what has been agreed before going."

Modhani hesitated for an imperceptible moment.

"Agreed. I follow thee, Captain."

The tent had been erected in the exact center of the encampment. A folding table had been placed in the center, and three folding stools. By gesture, Dorliac invited Modhani to be seated, handed him a pencil and placed a sheet of paper before him.

"What shall I write, Captain?"

"Thus: As Allah is my witness, I came to see Captain Dorliac to discuss terms of peace, in good faith. I came without treachery in my head or in my heart. I shall not do here that which I did at the well of Hamram, many years ago."

Modhani, placid, without a quivering of the fingers, wrote as directed. Then he looked up at Dorliac with a smile.

"Only one man can have told thee of Hamram, Captain."

Dorliac found time to marvel at his nerve. Modhani knew well that he was suspected, that the trick, if there was a trick, would fail. Yet he was gambling on the slender chance that he could bluff his way through. Perhaps, after all, he was sincere.

"There is but one man, Modhani. He who led us across the Jouf."

"And he who betrays men who spared him in the name of their God. But that which is written is written, and the book can not be altered."

"Falike!" Dorliac called.

The corporal entered, with two men. One private stood on either side of Modhani, while the non-com rested the muzzle of his Lebel against his neck.

"Is this good faith?" Modhani queried, smiling.

Then Legastel entered and took the vacant seat. He was still in native garb, but his beard had been trimmed, his glance had lost its stare of near-insanity.

"Dost thou know me, Modhani?" he asked.

"I know thee, dog!"

Legastel smiled.

"He is also a dog who comes with lying words of good faith, who fawns like a dog to bite those he dare not bite with a snarl. Is this once more the trick of Hamram?"

"I came in good faith," Modhani repeated.

"We shall see," Legastel laughed. "During the night, thy warriors have crawled near, and will attack. It was wise of me to conceal myself from the spies that came yesterday, who had no other purpose than to find out who had led the Franks across the Jouf. Thou art still a small boy, Modhani. Learn that a man who is old does not prefer the death of his friends to his own dishonor."

"I go now," Modhani said. But he did not move, feeling the rifle on his neck.

"Not so," Legastel resumed. "I shall go forth, clad in thy garments, on thy camel, and see what happens."

Modhani's eyes rested on Dorliac.

"I had thy promise of safety, Captain."

"Thou art safe so long as I have no proof of treachery. Let this man leave camp, go for an hour and return, and in the meantime no attack come, and I will allow thee to go safely."

"Has a promise so many exceptions?"

"It would seem so," Legastel volunteered. "Thou didst grant life in the name of Allah. Yet thou left me to die in the sand. What is written is written, and dates that are plucked must be eaten."

Modhani tried to shout, but the blacks had been forewarned. A huge hand covered his mouth, while Falike, dropping the rifle, clasped him solidly in his arms. Dorliac was forced to reluctant admiration. The Moor would have sacrificed his life to warn his comrades. In three minutes, Modhani was stripped to the skin, fastened with rawhide lashes, his turban wound around his face from chin to eyes.

"Have no fear," Dorliac assured him. "I will let thee go if no attack comes."

Legastel completed his disguise, draped the veil across his face. He did not speak again, but strode out, accompanied by Dorliac. Ternay, twenty-five yards away, looked inquiringly toward the captain, who nodded shortly. If the lieutenant was not certain of the substitution, though aware that it was to take place in the tent, how could the natives discover in time?

The first difficulty encountered came from the camel, which was not deceived, and knew that the man in the saddle was not his master. But even a stubborn beast can be made to obey, and he lurched to his feet.

Legastel touched his forehead and chest in salute. Dorliac brought his hand to the helmet's brim, and the camel was led through the line of kneeling animals forming a rampart. In a dozen strides the rider was clear, and rode at a swift amble into the north.

Dorliac had no further orders to give, and walked back toward the tent leisurely. Ternay sat down behind his men and, as prearranged, groups of *Tirailleurs* moved about, to give the camp an appearance of casual routine. The captain took his place behind a pile of baggage. Conveniently placed within reach, flanked by two boxes of cartridges, were two revolvers. Standing aloof from the struggle, a good marksman could prove of immense help. And Dorliac's work was not to risk his life unnecessarily.

Four or five hundred yards away, Legastel halted, raised his hand in a signal, and after a slight pause turned back toward the camp. Men rose from the sand. Twenty-five or thirty, rushing forward silently. The *Tirailleurs* obeyed instructions and did not fire, although they were alert and ready. The first volley ripped out only when Legastel had raced into the camp and the Moors were within a hundred and fifty yards. Not a man fell, and it was not until the third volley that they began to drop.

Dorliac, knowing that the onslaught from the north was a mask for the real attack, with his voice steadied the men occupying the other faces of the square. And the real attack whirled in from the east, toward Ternay—the warriors appearing so unexpectedly that they were almost on the bayonets before the first shot was fired.

Gros brought the machine-gun into play on the flank of this second wave of attack. The French machine-gun fires six hundred shots to the minute. The sand dust rose in a thin cloud as the bullets struck short. Then Gros rectified his aim, found the target. According to his instructions, Ternay had withdrawn his men at the double, and the Moors, fired upon from front and flank, wavered. Soon, it was more of an execution than a combat.

Modhani had spoken the truth when he claimed to have received reinforcements, for there were between one hundred and fifty to two hundred warriors on the field. That morning, the Rekabats fought, as they always fought, bravely. But without the advantage of surprize, with the

odds scarcely two to one, irregulars against professional soldiers, the issue was never in doubt.

In five minutes the attack was spent, two-thirds of the attackers down, most of them mowed by the machine-gun, which did not clog until near the end. Hand-grenades, hurled by the *Tirailleurs*, dispersed whole groups into headlong flight. Dorliac, from his station, picked out the leaders. The bugler at his side at last gave the signal to pursue, and the khaki-clad soldiers scattered, bayonets low.

Leaving the camp in charge of Ternay, Dorliac led a score of mounted men toward Gleb Doreno, to reach the Rekabats' camels. The warriors on guard did not resist long, took flight, abandoning two hundred and fifty camels, thirty of which were laden with merchandise and salt.

In nine years of desert fighting this was Dorliac's most complete success.

"WHAT shall we do with those fellows, Captain?"

Ternay, who had brought up the detachment to the Rock of Doreno, indicated the rear, where a group of Moors were surrounded by *Tirailleurs*. There were eleven on foot and ten perched on pack camels.

"After the order was given to cease firing they came back toward us, not showing fight. According to them, they would as soon be shot as left here afoot. I picked up the wounded, too."

Dorliac shrugged.

"I presume it was the humane thing to do. But we have them on our hands, now."

He signaled for the prisoners to line up before him, and examined the wounds. Two had suffered smashed legs from machine-gun bullets, a third was riddled with bayonet thrusts. The others showed various slashes and bullet-holes of less gravity. Dorliac ordered water brought from the captured baggage and detailed a dozen men, under supervision of Rombier, to wash and bandage the injuries.

"I'll decide what to do later, after conferring with the major. I don't believe we have to fear an offensive return by the survivors. Where is Modhani?"

"Trussed up like a sausage, with Falike in charge."

"Bring him here."

Modhani was led forward, freed of all bonds save those fastening his wrists behind him. He was still smiling; his glance was as proud as when he believed in his own success.

"Well done, Captain. Those who called thee warrior spoke the truth. It does seem that I would go back to Birek."

Dorliac did not reply but addressed Legastel and Ternay in French.

"There is no question of recrossing the Jouf. We will cut across the extreme north end of it, and then progress south. It will take us about a month."

"Perhaps a bit more; perhaps a bit less," Legastel said. "It's out of the question to take the prisoners back with us. They have no sense of gratitude, and would make off with the best baggage-beasts as soon as they could manage it. It would be a perpetual danger. You probably share my distaste for a wholesale execution."

"We're not savages," Ternay admitted.

"Moreover, they're not to blame. They fight in a way that is fitted to them, and surprize is legitimate warfare, anywhere."

"Modhani—is another problem," Dorliac put in. "To believe that a man as clever as he would not find occasion to escape if given thirty or forty days' time, is madness. To free him is of no use. He would be another El Kounta loose in the Sahara."

Abidin Uld Sheik el Kounta is celebrated throughout Islam as an irreductible foe of the unbelievers. He fought the French near Timbuktu, in his native land, passed to Mauretania later, to oppose the conquering columns, and, from Tafilalet, still remains the guiding spirit of many raids into the fertile south.

"Three times has he come with words of peace," Legastel remarked. "And

each time he lied. He hates us. To allow him to go would be equivalent to sacrificing a score of officers in cold blood."

"That is my opinion also," Dorliac approved.

"Perhaps I should remain silent, having personal revenge to consider," Legastel went on. "But I give my word of honor, that even had Modhani been my personal friend, I would have spoken as I have. Ternay, do you approve also?"

"I do, yes."

Dorliac smiled nervously.

"Unanimous, I see. He has deserved death for his cold-blooded assassinations. To sit in deliberate court martial would be more regular, but more or less a comedy, since we all agree. Modhani is to be shot."

"Yes," Legastel said.

"Ternay, you attend to the necessary details."

The detachment was drawn up in good order, six men under Falike standing with grounded arms ahead of the rest. Two others set to work digging a hole. As a background loomed the immense red pillar of Doreno, on which multicolored shadows played as on a screen. There came a poignant moment of silence, during which the sound of the sand slithering on the steel of the small trench-spades cut clear.

The bugle rang.

Dorliac had called to his side one of the auxiliaries, a skinny Moor of the Adrar. The captain could carry on conversation of a sort, but he did not feel equal to an oration in dialect, at least on this grim occasion. The prisoners were led forward.

"You, the Rekabat people," the interpreter shouted, "have fought us and have been beaten. The others are fleeing without water, without booty, without glory, with the shame of beaten men. You know that it is not good to fight the French, who have no quarrel with the Rekabats, who wish only to live at peace with all people of the desert. Why are we here, you ask?

"We are here to show you, as we have shown the people of the north, as we have shown the tribes near the great river that passes by Kabara, which is near to Timbuktu, the way to a prosperity in which men live for peace. You know that nowhere have we interfered with your customs, with your religion. You have not understood, and you have been broken by us.

"Be wise. Know that in Timbuktu, in Algeria, in Senegal, the *marabouts* are respected by us and respect us. You see at our side true followers of Allah, who have fought with us and will work with us.

"We could have killed you all. But instead, hear what we will do. To each man there will be given a camel, a rifle, and five cartridges for each five men—we know that men can not go far unarmed in the desert—sufficient water to reach the next well on the way home. Go to your tents and tell what we have done; ask whether it was the way of men. Tell your chiefs that if they will send a delegation to us at Birek, and agree there not to raid the tribes friendly to us, to leave our patrols alone, there will be no more fighting."

The prisoners, who had squatted to listen, probably expecting a harsher sentence, did not exhibit emotion.

"They take us for fools," Ternay suggested.

"And hope to see us again," Dorliac added.

"As for your chief, he who had led you to defeat, we can not forgive him. Time after time he has come with a false tongue and a false heart, time after time has he lied. He would accept his life but to speak against us again, to kill if he could. Had he come back with us as he promised, in good faith, so kind are the French chiefs, he would have been spared. There are Moslem grounds where he could have spent his exile until such time as his heart was sound. But it is too late —and he must die!"

Modhani listened with set face, impassive, as if he had not understood. He was very straight, very bold, but the beard appeared to bristle from yellow

putty. His glance was calm, although he could not conceal his inner revolt against death while in the strength of youth.

"He must die!" concluded the interpreter.

There was a pause. The diggers stood by the grave.

Dorliac stepped toward Modhani.

"A cigaret?"

"No. Smoking is forbidden. What men forget in life, they remember—"

"Five minutes more," Dorliac added. "Is there anything thou dost wish to say?"

"I wish to have my hands free that I may pray."

The wrist bonds were severed. Modhani retired a short distance from the others, spread a rug brought him by one of his followers, and prostrated himself. Unhurriedly, as if he felt that no one could halt him, he prayed, in the manner of his race. His calls rang loud in the stillness.

The five minutes elapsed. Five more. Modhani rubbed sand on his hands, passed his fingers before his face repeatedly. He rose, and his eyes, strangely luminous, met those of the white men. His lips were set tightly. He extended his arms to be tied, mutely.

"No need, Modhani."

Modhani did not thank him, but moved to a spot near the grave and faced the six men drawn up before him with loaded rifles. Gros took his position.

Dorliac hesitated. To read the sentence in French would be but to unnecessarily prolong the ceremony. The Frenchmen present knew why Modhani was about to die, the Moors had heard the proclamation, and the blacks did not care.

The shadow of Doreno lengthened on the sand, in a sharp, jutting angle of black-blue, toward Modhani. As if prearranged it suddenly engulfed the lone figure, while all others were in the sunlight.

Gros looked toward Dorliac.

"Ready—aim—"

The last word was lost in the discharge. Mohani fell forward, like a wall, all in one piece. The bugler placed the instrument to his lips, and the *Tirailleurs* filed by at a quick step. Gros casually placed his revolver against Modhani's ear and pressed the trigger.

That was all.

DAWN had broken over the plain of Hamram, and rose light bathed the desert, trembling like a pink mist in the distance. Huddled shapes under blankets —the *Tirailleurs* were asleep. The footfalls of the sentries were muffled by the sand. Already there was an uneasy stirring among the camels, vague grumbles, the sleepy curse of a driver.

"What luck?" Dorliac asked, when Ternay joined him.

"It's settled," Ternay replied.

Legastel's resolution to remain in the desert had been sapped steadily by the arguments of the two younger men. They had pointed out that his clear duty was to return. The major's viewpoint had become saner with the passing days, although Modhani's death seemed to have deprived him of the strong purpose that had borne him up under the hardships of so many years. His health had broken.

They had succeeded in making him see that his offense against honor, immense in the native's eyes, was trivial after a career such as his. Happiness was possible— If he could not endure the thought of France, he could live in southern Algeria, near enough to the Sahara to allay his longing for space.

"It will be a queer thing, Ternay, to see Legastel in a dinner-suit."

"He finally said that he would come back," Ternay went on, "and talked about how happy he would be, made plans—all night long—wouldn't let me leave him. And I sat there like a blind fool—not realizing. He's dead, Dorliac!"

"Dead?"

"He stopped talking, that was all. Like a clock when the spring has run down. It seemed as if he lived but to see Modhani slain. We should have foreseen it. Now, I remember that he was growing weaker and weaker each day.

Fagged out—there is a difference between tending sheep and traveling through the Jouf." Ternay held his head in his hands. "I should have left him alone; not nagged him to come back—"

Dorliac was silent. Then he lifted his glance toward the sky.

"There are those who will tell you it was written up there. If so, a mistake has been made. There is no just balance between suffering and reward, Ternay."

"What are you going to say, Dorliac?"

"I'll hand in a report with the true facts and leave it for the colonel to decide. He probably will think that it is best not to bring things out; the sergeants can be trusted."

"And what should I write home?"

"Only fools reopen old wounds," Dorliac concluded.

AT THE post of Birek, Dorliac reported the success of his mission. The commander declared himself pleased, read the report with some surprize, and wrote another for official publication, which showed the captain and his men in a glowing light, but failed to credit the real leader. It was stated, however, that the detachment had found Major Legastel's remains in the vicinity of Hamram, and had buried the hero with fitting military honors.

In Dorliac's room, ten weeks' mail had accumulated. The captain, clad in a pair of white trousers, opened envelopes and unfolded newspapers. Before long, Ternay dropped in.

"I have a letter," he announced.

"Lucky fellow."

"My fiancée writes that her mother has at last been persuaded that she had delayed too long—"

Dorliac straightened in his chair.

"And then?"

"She married. Here's the engraved card," Ternay added with a shaky laugh.

Dorliac turned the pasteboard between his fingers, noticed the date.

"We were just emerging from the Jouf on that day—they had more to drink than we did. The clear lesson of this, Ternay, do you know what it is?"

"That a man should never be sure of a woman?"

"Pessimist! No—that what is written is written, and that once in a while it turns out to be right."

The Camp-Fire

A free-to-all Meeting-Place *for Readers, Writers and Adventurers*

ON THE tenth of last February Gordon MacCreagh set sail for Abyssinia to conduct there *Adventure's* Abyssinian Expedition and to write for us exclusive accounts of the expedition. The second installment of the accounts appears in this issue.

Most of you know Gordon MacCreagh as an old time member of our writers' brigade and an A. A. man. He's been writing things for the magazine, when he hasn't been wandering in some previously unexplored part of the world, for more than fourteen years now. He says that he hates to write, that exploring is his profession. I think that his account of the expedition's attack on the ant hills, in this issue, shows that he combines the two very nicely. Those of you who have read "White Waters and Black," an account of an expedition on which he conducted six scientists up the Amazon, know that already.

The purpose of this present expedition is to try to find what truth lies in certain native Abyssinian legends. Is the true Ark of the Covenant somewhere in the mountains of Abyssinia, as the natives believe? Does a tribe of Jews there practice rituals and ceremonies handed down from Solomon's day? Can Celtic inscriptions be found on ruins south of the capital, Adis Abeba? Do tribesman on the Sudanese border hunt wild animals with swords similar to those carried by the Crusaders?

There will also be big game hunting, and Mr. MacCreagh will collect specimens of Abyssinian wild life for the United States National Museum, perhaps better known as the Smithsonian Institution.

But mostly—and this is the really important thing—Gordon McCreagh has gone, as he says, "to see what he can see," and to write about it for us on the spot. There will probably be another article in the October first issue. It takes five weeks for mail to get here from Abyssinia.

In the first account he told how the expedition overcame the difficulties put in its way by provincial officialdom, got a base established in Adis Abeba, bought camels and set about the important business of hiring a real guide.

Besides writing and exploring Gordon MacCreagh can play the bagpipes. He is a not very tall Scotchman with a mild blue eye and a milder voice, and shoulders like a gorilla.

TO THE discussion of the *gaucho* a few words are added by Post Sargent.

I have never had the pleasure of meeting one face to face. So you really have me there. Peruvian *salitre* workers, Brazilian rubber gatherers, Basque sheepherders and the like, yes! but nary a *gaucho*. Yet, like Mr. Steinmetz, who never visited the heavens, yet had the lightning domesticated as a household pet, I have long been acquainted with the *gaucho* in all his manifestations, as a representative of a type of civilization that he himself created. Where? At home, in my library. In the literature of South America he stands out as vividly, as luridly, as poetically, as picturesquely, as Mirabeau or Robespierre in French Revolution history and literature.

With just a word of appreciation of Mr. Hopkins' story, I'll proceed to give several titles of books

that may be of interest to readers of Camp-Fire who may be desirous of following the matter further.

FIRST, you are doubtless right in assuming that there have been several periods of *gaucho* history. Life and civilization are not static, otherwise one might expect to find that the Visigoths were holding over in Spain as sturdily as in 711. Conditions in the Argentine have so changed in the past seventy-five years as to cause a gradual change in the condition and character of the *gaucho*, as changing conditions in our own West have affected our cow-boy. The interest today in stories of western cow-boys lies in the fact that the setting is really that of many years ago. Will Rogers as a cow-boy is an anachronism; Will Rogers as a second Mr. Dooley with an aura of fifty years ago on the plains, is the really interesting thing.

The *gaucho* of, say, 1776 to 1860, to ascribe dates roughly, was to the history of Uruguay and the Argentine what the *knight* was, in the age of chivalry, to European civilization. In making and studying such a statement one takes into account the difference in the two civilizations, the time element, the changed ethical, educational and economic standards, and the like. I mean to say, that the *gaucho* had a kinship, psychologically, with the knight-errant of the Middle Ages. Take, for instance, one of the idealistic knights so well portrayed by Mr. Brodeur—rover, troubador, fighter, mystic, academically ignorant if intrinsically wise, righter of wrongs, brave, sympathetic and usually tender, holding his spurs as the symbol of his knighthood, and his horse as the necessary companion in his exploits—take such a knight, place him down on the *pampas* of the Argentine four or five centuries later, inject Indian blood into his veins, make him conscious of a different economic environment—you have the *gaucho*. Still brave, ignorant yet intelligent, mystic, a singer of deeds, a righter of wrongs, a real knight errant amid more modern conditions.

THE MODERN *gaucho* must be a different creature and is, since no human can remain unchanged in the surging tide of what we are pleased to term "Progress." To be un-Burbanked by the hand of this machine and economized age is to confess that one has no vital sap to be used or abused.

Probably the best book for American readers on the subject of the *gaucho* is "Martin Fierro, an Epic of the Argentine," by Dr. Henry A. Holmes. Published by the Institute de las Espanas, in N. Y., 1923. It is a comparatively short study but sufficiently complete. It has the virtue of giving the English translation of the *gaucho* poetry cited in the text. Also much fine bibliography. In addition to several works (in English) cited by Mr. Hopkins, it refers to many Spanish works that cover practically the whole history of the *gaucho* from his origins to the present day. To be sure, the subject will remain a closed book to those who are unable to read Spanish, since few, if any, of the works cited have been translated.

Twenty-four Years in the Argentine Republic, J. A. King, London, 1846.
La Vie et les Moeurs a la Plata, E. Daireaux, Buenos Aires, 1888.
La Tradicion Nacional, J. V. Gonzalez, Buenos Aires, 1912.
Facundo, by the celebrated writer Sarmiento. Buenos Aires, 1915. (The last two mentioned are perhaps the last word in the study of *gaucho* psychology and characteristics.)
Au pays des Gauchos, H. Leturque, Librairie Illustrée, Paris.
El Viaje Intelectual, Pablo Groussac, Madrid, 1904.

There are various authoritative studies through the medium of fiction, poetry, etc., among which are:

Tipos y Paisajes, G. Daireaux, Buenos Aires, 1901.
El Terruno, C. Reyles, Montevideo, 1916.
Alma Nativa, M. Leguizamon, Buenos Aires, 1914.
Cuentos Argentinos, M. Ugarte, Paris, 1915.

Blasco-Ibañez has a long digression that concerns a *gaucho* and Argentine, in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse;* as also a short story called *El Préstamo de la Difunta*. Despite his stay in the Argentine, his characterization should not be taken too seriously, in my opinion.

A suggestive work, that bears out what I have said above with regard to the chivalric characteristics of the *gaucho*, is, *Los Payadores Gauchos: the Descendants of the Juglares of Old Spain in La Plata*. F. M. Page, Darmstadt, 1897.

Groussac, cited above, sums up the *gaucho* as follows:

"The gaucho is a wanderer, a prodigal son of society. Born in some rancho of the Argentine pampa, a branch soon severed from the parent trunk, raised on horseback, he learns from boyhood days to struggle and suffer. He matures, face to face with impassive nature, holding always this notion: that he should not and cannot rely on anyone save himself alone . . .

"An infinitesimal speck in the midst of that emptiness which for him is the whole universe . . . he has every sense sharpened as though it were an indispensable weapon; has acquired the hearing and scent of a wild animal, the keen vision of a falcon; and he likewise possesses that bodily insensibility, that resistance to cold and hunger, that faculty of enduring pain and healing his injuries, characteristic of lower organisms.

"He hires out on some great cattle ranch, but almost never for long; since he prefers to wander in quest of festivity, brandings and races, urged by the incurable desire for adventure and the homesickness for the desert. Indolent and a spendthrift, what money he earns slips through his fingers.

"With all his vices and peccadilloes, one always comes to love him, for he is frank, brave, hospitable, very loyal, and even ingenuous beneath his hirsute exterior."

The above quotation is, of course, only a point of view of one who sees from the Spanish end. A Frenchman—give him the same data—might well view the *gaucho* as an entirely different creature, applying to him the French qualities of orderliness and logic. A "Nordic" might take exception to him on the score of cleanliness and sobriety. Of the occidental races, the true Kelt, I suspect, would best understand him.—POST SARGENT.

ALTHOUGH Alan LeMay, whose serial of the Mississippi begins in this issue, is by no means new to our pages, he rises to tell us something about himself.

I was born in 1899 in Indianapolis. My forefathers are a good deal more interesting than myself. One of my great-grand-fathers was killed by Indians at Deer Creek, Indiana, when he left the besieged blockhouse in an attempt to fetch water. Another was lost off the Horn in his own full-rigged ship, the *Eagle*. One of my grandfathers was wounded in the battle of Kenesaw Mountain; there were six of the family in that fight. My other grandfather was killed by a buffalo on the Kansas plains. One of them made a fortune in cattle, and lost it again. Four of the family, one a captain, fought at Bunker Hill; five were engaged in the French and Indian War—two on the French side of the fence, three on the other. A LeMay built the first edifice—a trapper's hut—where Chicago stands today.

I am a graduate of the University of Chicago. I have acted as horse wrangler in Colorado, swamper in Wisconsin, fisherman off Florida, super-cargo on a schooner in the Caribean, geologist in the Colombian coast jungles, sparring partner for a welterweight in Chicago. During the war I was a shavetail in the infantry at eighteen, but didn't get over. Since then I have been a first lieutenant, horse and reconnaissance, in the 124th Field Artillery, Illinois National Guard. I've also tried several other things, none of them for very long, but each, I was told, for long enough.

One of my stories, "The Three Missing Men," was translated into the French by Maurice Beerblock, who translated O. Henry. It appeared in *Lectures pour Tous*.—ALAN LEMAY.

SOMETHING from John Webb in connection with his story in this issue.

As I understand it, the word "voodoo" is merely a corruption of the French word "vaudoux," which means magic, or perhaps black magic; I forget. I have heard the word in Haiti a thousand times, and it is pronounced "voodoo;" but in a book on creole, the Haitian language, that I read years ago and have since lost track of, it was given the original French spelling, the reason given being that Haiti is probably the only place where the word has not been corrupted—a strange thing, too, for in the polyglot jargon called creole the numerous originally French words are mostly unrecognizable.—JOHN WEBB.

THIS is as good a place as any to print a reply to something Mr. Webb said in Camp-Fire about *Robinson Crusoe*. At that time I asked whether *Robinson* wasn't the hero of the first adventure story. Captain Dingle, below, nominates Noah. Well—*Robinson Crusoe* and Noah were both sailors, and, by an astounding coincidence, so are Captain Dingle and Mr. Webb. Hasn't some landsman among you got a candidate for the job?

Mr. John Webb's rather lengthy argument about Robinson Crusoe's Island is scarcely necessary to show where the real island was.

Tobago is indicated without doubt in all analyses of the yarn. I think nobody disputes that.

Where Juan Fernandez comes in is in this regard: Alexander Selkirk, a real seaman—I mean an actual being—was marooned out of Lord Anson's fleet, on Juan Fernandez, and lived there for several years.

Out of Selkirk's experiences Defoe wrote his immortal novel, Robinson Crusoe. Hence the association of his hero with Juan Fernandez. I think all students of literature will agree with this.

As for the editorial query, "Was Robinson Crusoe the first adventure story?" well, what about Noah's trip?—DINGLE.

GEORGES SURDEZ, another old-time member of our writers' brigade, tells of the travel and study that gave him the background for his African stories; one of which appears in this issue.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

Ever since I can recall, Africa has intrigued me.

By the time I had reached my twelfth birthday, I had read everything available in French: Caille, Duveyrier, Delafosse, translations of Barth and other German explorers, of Stanley, etc. I still have books received as prizes in French Schools: All about Africa. So that my "bug" had been noted. I had read the Tarikh es Soudan of Abderrahman ben Abdallah, and the history of the French Conquest by Captain Gatelet. As soon as I was able to read English, a new field opened before me. I discovered that many fine books had not been translated into French.

When I at last reached Africa, it was not strange to me, I did not have to waste time learning the rudiments myself. Having the physical, racial and historical background, I concentrated upon the precise touch that cannot be discovered in books, the *feeling* of Africa.

From officers and non-coms in the Colonial Army, I learned much. Strangely enough, the average civilian, trader or government employee, is content to use pigeon English or French, learns no more than a few choice expressions in native dialect, and therefore knows comparatively little. The army man lives with his men, must know their problems and reactions. He is the one to tackle for information.

To imagine places and things in the heroic days is easy. Native habits and dwellings change but little. Wipe out such modern things as tiled bungalows, narrow gage railways and wide roads, and the town or village that you have before your eyes shifts back to what it was formerly. For the sake of precision, I found out that the night watchmen throughout French Africa are in general former soldiers. With a little tobacco, and a sympathetic expression, one can make them talk. I have spoken with men who followed Mangin, Gouraud and the rest in "the good old days," when Africa was Africa.

I have kept in touch, by mail, with several friends, several still in the army. They are ready to help me out. Takes from two to three months to get an answer. But there is a certain feeling of satisfaction in feeling firm ground under one's feet. At that, I have been chided with giving a Ouolof a Bambara first name!

I am permitted to mention one of my sources of information: Massemba. He is a Senegalese. He has studied in France, in Constantinople, in Bagdad, in Alexandria. He is Doctor of Koranic Law and *Hadji*. He was for several years official interpreter in Timbuktu. During the Great War, he served on the French and Near East Fronts, under Gouraud, as interpreter for the Fourth Army Corps. Before that, he recruited colored soldiers for France from Mauretania to the Congo. He speaks Ouolof, a dozen other negro dialects, Arabic, Turkish, Berber and their dialects. Also French, and passable English. Massemba has been to Belgium, to Berlin, to Rome, and has lived in Paris. He assisted French savants in research work on African matters. Somewhat of a poet! A direct descendant of Diop, King of Senegal, he might call himself Grand Duke of Gandiole, but prefers to be called Amadou. He can wear, when he cares to, which is seldom, the Legion of Honor, the Croix de Guerre with Palms, and the Black Star of Benin. Physically, he is a well muscled man, standing six foot one inch in his bare feet, and weighing close to two hundred.

He has more than once proved a plank of salvation for me, when just the needed detail escaped me.

There are others, but they are shy, sensitive creatures—who would withdraw their friendship should I plunge them into print.

One thing it might be well to add: Although born in Bienne, known as Biel in German, I can claim no Nordic blood. I come from Spanish and French stock. Bienne and the Jura formed part of the French Department of High-Rhine until handed over to the Swiss Confederation by the Treaty of Vienna in 1815. Born a Swiss, I can't explain away the holes in the cheese, and I am but a poor yodler. —Georges Surdez.

A FAMOUS weapon for sport and war still flourishes in Belgium. One of you wanted to know how to make a cross-bow.

Washington, D. C., August 10, 1925.

Cross-bows are still used in Belgium, or were just before the war and were a regular article of trade in a number of houses supplying sporting goods. In 1903 Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey published "The Cross-Bow" (Longmans was the publisher) which contains detailed descriptions and directions for making them. From his book I take the following data.

There were several cross-bow clubs which held regular meets in Belgium at the time the book was published and several houses in Brussels supplied them. The cross-bow in customary use as furnished by these firms had or has a range of 250 yards, and will drive a bolt through a rabbit at 60 yards. It is much lighter than the ancient war weapon but is "almost as accurate as a rook rifle up to 50 yards." Gallwey says he can put eight bolts out of twelve in a six-inch circle at sixty yards. He states that his book contains detailed directions for making a cross-bow such as "any amateur of fair skill should be able to construct."

I suggest that Mr. Feldman might write to the American consul in Brussels and thus get in touch with the regular dealers.

Payne-Gallwey has written several books on this subject or similar ones and if he gets a copy at the library he should be careful to get the right one or he will be disappointed to find that the cross-bow is but lightly touched upon.—Alfred Buehl.

HAROLD LAMB'S biography of Genghis Khan is to be published this fall by McBride. This life of the Mongol conqueror will be the first authentic one to be published in this country, and, apparently, the second in the English language—the other being a short life translated from the Chinese annals by Prof. R. K. Douglas in England some two generations ago. Title, "Genghis Khan—the Emperor of All Men."

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Movie Swordsmanship

ALL OF us have wondered just how authentic is a cinema hero's imposing sword-play. A close-up or two of the *passage d'armes* of the screen.

Request:—"I would be very much obliged if you could answer the following question on fencing: How good do you consider the fencing and dueling of the various heroes of motion pictures today?"—ELIZABETH MARSHALL, New York, N. Y.

Reply, by Lieutenant John V. Grombach:—Although your question is a far reaching one I will try to answer it as best I can.

The fencing and dueling of the various actors in the motion pictures fall generally into one of three subdivisions:

(a) The swordsmanship shown by those in the profession who happen to be expert fencers; these are very few and far between.

(b) The exhibition of correct fencing form in parts of pictures specially directed by fencing experts.

(c) The swashbuckling, rollicking type of sword-wielding practised by some of the more athletic actors, who actually know very little about the art of "parry and riposte."

The late Max Linder, French comedian, is the only example I can recall under the first group. Linder was not only an expert fencer, but had considerable experience in competition in the *salle d'armes* of Paris. This "Three Must Get Theirs" is such an exceptionally perfect comedy along fencing lines that it was shown at a private entertainment given by the New York Fencers' Club to the visiting English International Fencing Team in the winter of 1925.

The next heading concerns such feature pictures as "Monsieur Beaucaire" with the late Rudolf Valentino and "Scaramouche" featuring Ramon Navarro. In one of these pictures a *passage d'armes* is even shown in exact detail by a close-up of the crossed rapiers viewed along the arm of the hero. In this particular scene the fencing instructor and one of his pupils actually doubled for the actors.

The imaginatively impressive full arm swings of Douglas Fairbanks in the "Mark of Zorro" and in the "Black Pirate" or those of John Barrymore in "Don Juan" are more effective in adding the proper color and action to those presentations than they are from a fencing standpoint. If any one with a slight knowledge of the game opposed them the very first drawing back of the arm for one of the romantic sweeps would be an immediate invitation for a "cut to the cuff," and the hero would be minus an arm.

Before closing I can not resist the temptation to recount a true anecdote about a certain movie actor who desired to convey the impression that he was a good swordsman. Prior to the 1924 Olympics, efforts were made all over the country to raise the necessary funds. Some one got the bright idea of staging an exhibition between this popular and world famous person and some of the leading American fencers. The principal was duly asked, and he stated that he would be very glad to oblige providing he be guaranteed the winning of every bout!

Alberta

ONE HUNDRED and sixty acres of good land free—if one will do some work to improve it.

Request:—"If it is not asking too much will you kindly send me information regarding Yukon, B. C., and Alberta on trapping, hunting and homesteading; also Canadian land laws in regard to non-residents?"—C. ROSENBERG, Hawaii.

Reply, by Mr. Plowden:—You can get one hundred and sixty acres of land *free,* by putting in

three years residence and doing a fair amount of work upon it. If you write to "Information, Govt. Bldgs., Edmonton, Alberta, they will send you maps and printed matter. To get trapper's license you have to be a British subject, and this I fear puts you out. If you, however, were to homestead land, you could trap upon and around it, and I think once you have started work the "British subject" would be got over. I think it is best to leave all further details to the very clear and full pamphlets they will send you.

Ambergris

ANOTHER prank of nature: A bane of the whale that is a boon to man.

Request:—"Will you please tell me about ambergris?"—HERBERT WOLFE, Los Gatos, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. Charles Bell Emerson:—Ambergris is a fatty secretion formed in *some* sperm whales.

It is taken from whales directly, but is more often found floating in the water, especially in the waters of tropical countries. It is also found cast upon beaches in lumps which sometimes weigh more than 200 pounds; this is lucky for the finder.

On exposure to the air this material develops a sweet, earthy odor, in place of its original and very unpleasant odor. Ambergris has a high commercial value as a material used in the manufacture of perfumes; the price is increasing, due to the scarcity of the sperm whale, and the growing demand for this material. Ambergris is found in the intestines of the whale. It apparently forms because of some stomach trouble, or whale-indigestion Maybe that is why Jonah was not allowed to remain where some history says he was.

This material is also used in making oil for the bearings of fine watches.

Kimberly Diamonds

SO STRICT is government supervision that an official must be present at the digging of even a gate-post.

Request:—"I wonder if you could give me any information on the new diamond field discovered in South Africa. Is any one allowed to dig for diamonds? Do you require a license? What outfit do you require? Do you really think it is worth going out there? Are there many diamonds discovered nowadays?"—J. ASHE, Lancashire, England.

Reply, by Captain F. J. Franklin:—The law is very strict in South Africa regarding digging for diamonds. Only authorized persons under the strictest supervision are allowed the privilege. In Kimberley if a householder wishes to dig even a hole for a gate-post, a government official is present and the soil which comes out of the hole in the ground is carefully sieved, and if any diamonds are found, a *pro rata* division is made on the value of any diamond found.

If the spirit of adventure is strong within you and you have a little capital, say five hundred pounds, I believe you would have a good sporting chance by going to Kimberley and trying your luck on the Vaal River diggings. At the same time you might keep your eyes open for any new diamond field rushes and be on the spot if such an occasion occurs. Although I predict that the public in future will not be allowed to participate in these rushes, and some other means will be found to insure an equitable deal for stake claimers.

Panama Canal

HOW THE ships negotiate the locks. Raised and lowered in the process a full eighty-five feet, and with the utmost precision and safety.

Request:—"Will you please tell me the exact method of passing a ship through the Panama Canal?"—DOROTHY DANIELS, Los Gatos, Cal.

Reply, by Charles Bell Emerson:—No ship is allowed to pass into the Panama Canal unless it has a "canal p lot" on board, in charge of the operations of the vessel.

Starting at the sea-level channel, the first, second and third gates are opened and the ship is towed (by powerful electrically operated locomotives) into the first lock. Then the second and third gates are closed, and the lock is then filled with water by gravity; this raises the ship at the rate of 2 feet per minute. When the water has reached the level of the water in the lock above, then gates four and five are opened and the vessel is towed in. Gate four is again closed, and water is let into this lock until it reaches the level of the third one. Gates six and seven and eight are next opened, and the ship is towed into the upper lock. Gates six and seven are then closed, and the water allowed to fill the third lock until the ship's waterline is level with the surface of Gatun Lake. Then gates nine and ten are opened; the emergency dam is swung clear of the channel and the towing engines let go of the ship, which proceeds on its journey of 32 miles of clear sailing, under its own power, until it reaches Pedro Miguel.

Here by a reverse of the previously described process, the ship is dropped down 30 feet 4 inches. Then on to the Milaflores (Spanish for "See the Flowers") a mile and a half farther on, where it is "lifted down" 54 feet 8 inches in two more lifts, which brings the ship back to sea-level; thence it steams out through a channel 500 feet wide and eight miles long, to the Pacific ocean, the ship having gone through the process of being raised and lowered 85 feet, and yet in no way having been strained or injured in the operation.

BOOKS *you can* Believe

A YEAR AMONGST THE PERSIANS: by Edward Granville Brown. The Macmillan Co. The journal of a twelve months' residence in Persia in the years 1887 and 1888. An extraordinarily fascinating and instructive book of travel written in a fluent, scholarly style that is never wearisome. Sir E. Dennison Ross in his Memoir of the author says truly: "It is, however, more than a mere record of travel, and goes far beyond the ordinary limits of such works, for apart from its lively and entrancing descriptions of Persia and its people, it is an infallible guide to modern Persian literature and thought, and as such should always find its place on the student's shelf." A really worth-while book.—CAPT. BEVERLEY-GIDDINGS.

THE REVOLT IN THE DESERT: by E. H. Lawrence. Doran. An absorbing narrative of world-war events in Arabia and Palestine, told by one of the most interesting Gentleman Adventurers alive today, Col. E. H. Lawrence, the "Uncrowned King of Arabia." There is no attempt throughout the autobiography to mince words or soften details; its ascetic virility (there is really an impression of asceticism prevailing throughout) is entirely fascinating. Lovers of world-war literature will find in this a distinct and highly interesting departure from the usual run. The book is splendidly written, undoubtedly accurate, and an outstanding joy to one with a love of the far places. Easily the best of its type I have read in years.—CAPT. BEVERLY-GIDDINGS.

TO THE LAND OF THE EAGLE: by Paul Edmons, published by E. P. Dutton & Co., 681 Fifth Avenue, New York City, 1927. This is a very interesting book which carries the reader along through the highways and byways of Montenegro, Albania and the Island of Corfu, with the author just as he traveled. It is written by a "straight shooting" Englishman with a good deal of sympathy for the underdog. Very little politics come into the narrative except when the author cannot refuse a slight dig at the Italians. It has no historical background. It is merely the chatty story of a ramble in a little known part of the world by a man with good powers of observation and a sense of humor. It gives the prospective traveller to Albania a very good idea of what to expect and how to take it.—ROBERT SWAN TOWNSEND.

Lost Trails

All inquiries of this sort received by us, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with the inquirer's name. We reserve the right, in case the inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any number or other name, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and in general to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Except relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

HARDING, ABE—Sheep rancher in Australia. Had brother Joseph, building contractor in Eastham, Essex, England. If alive would like to correspond, or would like to hear from his descendants. CHARLES L. HARDING, Sec'y North Branch Y. M. C. A., Waterbury, Conn., U. S. A.

HOLIHAN, P. J.—Last heard of in Los Angeles, Calif., formerly of Peosta, Iowa. A plumber by trade. Have not heard from him in fourteen years. Reward of $50.00 for information as to his whereabouts. Brother—JOHN HOLIHAN, Glenwood, Iowa.

MARSHALL, JOHN—Born in Russia of Austrian parents. About twenty-eight years of age. Served in the Lightning Division, World War. Last heard of in Carlstrom Field, Arcadia, Florida. News of his whereabouts will be appreciated by his brother—KARL MARSHALL, U. S. C. G. Base 5, East Boston, Mass.

MORTON, OSCAR JACKSON—Last heard of twenty years ago, address was 4228 Ave. G, Galveston, Texas, in Jan. 1902. Was possibly employed on some boat or along the water front. Any news of him, either dead or alive will be gratefully received. Sister—MRS. FRANCES NICHOLS, 16 Avon Street, Hartford, Conn.

MCKIM—Please send me your address as my last letters were returned. FRED. HARVEY, 157½ Ruswick Street, Newburgh, New York.

ESLER, PERRY—Last heard from Sept. 8, 1924, at Davis, Calif. Lived formerly at Woodland, Calif., went to Sacramento and was employed there from Sept. to Nov. 15, 1924. Please notify mother—NELLIE ESLER PERRY, 505 Ogden St., Denver, Colo.

LLOYD, ED.—Formerly raised by Jim Davis near Craig, Colo., foreman at Cripple Creek mines, truck driver at Denver in 1900—I need him to manage big gold strike. Communicate with CHARLES G. LIVINGSTON, Paulsboro, New Jersey.

WOULD like to hear from any member of Company "A" 8th U. S. Inf. that served between 1899 to November 1917, or any friend or acquaintance that I made around Minneapolis, Minn., or Helena, Mont.—FRED R. (JACK) HANSCOM, 1st Sergt. U. S. Army, Retired, 6 Whipple Street, Kittery, Maine.

HOFFMAN, ARTHUR—Served in the 1st & 7th C. A. C. Fort Randolph, C. Z. 1917-1920, communicate with C. H. P., 3324 Poe Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio.

WILLIAMS, WILLIAM MOSES—Born in St. Louis, Mo., about 1863. Was a steam engineer. Last heard from in Panama. Was in the U. S. Army in 1898 stationed in Anniston, Alabama. Any information will be appreciated by WILLIAM J. WILLIAMS, 8804 Lafayette Blvd., Detroit, Mich.

"Old Songs that Men have Sung," appears in alternate issues.

The Trail *Ahead*

The next issue of ADVENTURE, *out September 15th*

Three *Complete Novelettes:*

The Arab

By Leonard H. Nason

A cavalryman and his horse! There is no finer sight than the two together. But not the major's orderly, *Johnell Sullivan*, and that firebrand of an animal that the major treasured above all else. And if poor *Johnell* found the spirited Arab a sore trial in the day's ordinary routine, consider his predicament when an army of Mexican outlaws swooped down on the cavalry cantonment.

South of '37

By Hugh Pendexter

Peddler, medicine-man, missionary and gambler—"*Doctor*" *Moses Good*, gray-bearded and amazingly adept at knife-throwing, made the whole of the Indian Territory his stamping ground. His young partner, *Labe*, wondered why the healer left so many towns at such short notice, though, had they known that their trail was being hounded by members of the Spakes gang, they would have found secret cause to make a less hurried departure.

A Stranger at Tromp's

By Captain Frederick Moore

Tromp, host of the Grand Hotel, of Gooravaya, South Seas, was worried. First, there was the strange fellow who appeared from the swamp, dry-shod. Then there was his neighbor who watched the stranger with the snooping eyes of a detective. And finally that ship that appeared on a horizon seldom visited by sea-craft.

And—*Other Good Stories*

Part Two of Old Father of Waters, *a novel of the glamourous days of Mississippi steamboats*, by Alan LeMay; The Bullpuncher, *hard men of the North Pacific logging camps*, by James Stevens; Fly-by-Night, *the air mail comes through*, by Richard Howells Watkins; Reserve Speed, *in the smoke of the dreadnoughts*, by John Brent; Teak, *flood-tide in the Siamese jungle*, by Clark Brockman; Half a Scalp, *two oldsters who would be bold sheriffs*, by Charles Tenney Jackson.

Adventure is out on the 1st and 15th of the month

"The Woman on the Devil Ship"

Photographs from the film by Ralph Ince

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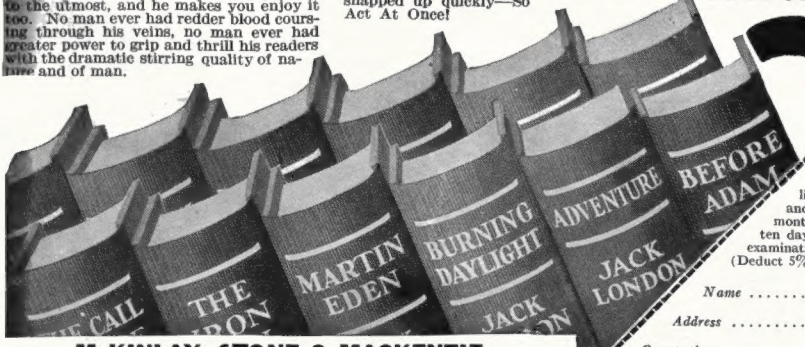

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One of the most wholesome tendencies in the world today is the growing respect for beautiful merchandise. Sheaffer is proud of having pioneered the beautification of fountain-pens. The jade-green pen, with the little white dot, not only loomed high in greater beauty, but set new standards of *dependability* because it was the studied achievement of fine craftsmanship. The Lifetime° pen *costs more* and is *worth more.* It is built to spend the most time in the writing hand and the least in the repair shop. Unconditionally guaranteed—free of repair charges. And its twin, the Titan pencil, is a worthy companion to this world favorite.

"Lifetime" pen, green or black, $8.75, Ladies', $7.50—pencil, $4.25. Others lower

At better stores everywhere

Blue Label Leads 15 cents

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